

Official Report of the
One Hundred Seventy-third
Annual General

CONFERENCE

of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

held in the Conference Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

April 5 and 6, 2003

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Report of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 5, 2003, at 10:00 A.M.

The general sessions of the conference were held at 10:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. on Saturday and Sunday, April 5 and 6, 2003. The general priesthood session was held on Saturday, April 5, at 6:00 P.M.

President Gordon B. Hinckley presided at all sessions of the conference. President Thomas S. Monson conducted the Saturday afternoon, general priesthood, and Sunday morning sessions. President James E. Faust conducted the Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon sessions.

The conference was carried by satellite transmission to thousands of Church buildings in many countries. In areas that did not receive this transmission, video recordings of the conference were sent to local distribution centers and were made available to all Church units. In addition, television and radio stations carried portions or all of the general sessions to large audiences throughout North America. The proceedings were also broadcast live worldwide over the Internet.

General Authorities

First Presidency: Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, David B. Haight, Neal A. Maxwell, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, and Henry B. Eyring

Presidency of the Seventy: Earl C. Tingey, D. Todd Christofferson, David E. Sorensen, Dennis B. Neuenschwander, Charles Didier, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and Merrill J. Bateman

First Quorum of the Seventy: Angel Abrea, Carlos H. Amado, Neil L. Andersen, William R. Bradford, Monte J. Brough, Sheldon F. Child, L. Whitney Clayton, Gary J. Coleman, Spencer J. Condie, Gene R. Cook, Quentin L. Cook, Claudio R. M. Costa, Robert K. Dellenbach, John B. Dickson, Christoffel Golden Jr., Walter F. González, John H. Groberg, Bruce C. Hafen, Donald L. Hallstrom, F. Melvin Hammond, Harold G. Hillam, F. Burton Howard, Jay E. Jensen, Marlin K. Jensen, Kenneth Johnson, W. Rolfe Kerr, Yoshihiko Kikuchi, Cree-L Kofford, John M. Madsen, Richard J. Maynes, Lynn A. Mickelsen, Glenn L. Pace, Bruce D. Porter, Carl B. Pratt, Ronald A. Rasband, Lynn G. Robbins, Cecil O. Samuelson Jr., Steven E. Snow, Francisco J. Viñas, Lance B. Wickman, and W. Craig Zwick

Second Quorum of the Seventy: Mervyn B. Arnold, E. Ray Bateman, Douglas L. Callister, Craig C. Christensen, Shirley D. Christensen, Val R. Christensen, Darwin B. Christenson, Keith Crockett, Adhemar Damiani, James M. Dunn, Daryl H. Garn, Duane B. Gerrard, D. Rex Gerratt, H. Aldridge Gillespie, Ronald T. Halverson, Keith K. Hilbig, J. Kent Jolley, Spencer V. Jones, Gerald N. Lund, Clate W. Mask Jr., Dale E. Miller, Merrill C. Oaks, Robert C. Oaks, Robert F. Orton, Stephen B. Oveson, William W. Parmley, Wayne S. Peterson, H. Bryan Richards, Ned B. Roueché, R. Conrad Schultz, W. Douglas Shumway, Dennis E. Simmons, Donald L. Staheli, Robert R. Steuer, David R. Stone, H. Bruce Stucki, D. Lee Tobler, William R. Walker, Gordon T. Watts, Stephen A. West, Robert J. Whetten, Richard H. Winkel, Robert S. Wood, and H. Ross Workman

Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, April 5, 2003. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and John Longhurst was the organist. To begin this session, the choir sang “High on the Mountain Top.” President Faust then made the following remarks.

President James E. Faust

My dear brothers and sisters, we welcome you to this, the first general session of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and at the overflow locations in the Tabernacle and the Assembly Hall. We likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this conference.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world. We are also pleased to make available these proceedings via Internet at lds.org.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing “High on the Mountain Top” and will now favor us with “Where Love Is.” At the conclusion of the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder J. Kent Jolley of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Where Love Is.”

Elder J. Kent Jolley offered the invocation.

President Faust

It will now be our pleasure to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

The progress of the Church

My beloved brethren and sisters, what a miracle it is that we are able to address you out across the world. We speak here in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City. We speak in our native tongue. But many thousands of you are assembled in Church facilities in many lands, and you hear us in 56 languages.

We are met again in a great world conference of the Church according to the will and instruction of the Lord.

As we do so, the world is in turmoil. There is war and contention. There is much of unrest. Members of the Church family are citizens of many nations. We find ourselves on both sides of a great debate. I intend to speak about this tomorrow morning.

But with all the troubles with which we are confronted, I am pleased to report that the work of the Church moves forward. We continue to grow across the world. Our missionary work goes on without serious impediment. Converts continue to come into the Church, and our numbers are constantly being increased.

Paralleling this activity is the need to solidly integrate all those who are baptized as converts. We call upon every member of the Church to reach out to new converts, to put your arms around them and make them feel at home. Bless them with your friendship. Encourage them with your faith. See that there are no losses among them. Every man, woman, or child who is worthy of baptism is worthy of a secure and friendly situation in which to grow in the Church and its many activities.

Our sacrament meeting attendance gradually edges up. There is room for improvement, and I urge you to work at it constantly. Even so, I do not know of another church with as high a percentage of consistent attendance at its meetings.

Increased strength of our youth

I am so grateful for the strength of the youth of the Church. Sadly enough, some fall between the cracks. But it is a miracle to witness the strength of our young people in the midst of all of the sordid temptation that is constantly around them. The sleaze and the filth of pornography, the temptation to partake of drugs, the titillating invitation to drop all bars on sexual behavior, these are among some of the enticing attractions they constantly face. Notwithstanding the allurement of the world in which they live, they remain true to the faith of their fathers and the gospel they love. I cannot say enough of good concerning our wonderful young people.

Faithfulness in tithes and offerings

Faith in the payment of tithes and offerings increases despite the straitened

economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are able to go forward with the building of meetinghouses and temples, with our vast education program, with the very many activities which are conditioned upon the tithing income of the Church. I promise you that we will not put the Church in debt. We will strictly tailor the program to the tithing income and use these sacred funds for the purposes designated by the Lord.

I call attention to that which has received much notice in the local press. This is our decision to purchase the shopping mall property immediately to the south of Temple Square. We feel that we have a compelling responsibility to protect the environment of the Salt Lake Temple. The Church owns most of the ground on which this mall stands. The owners of the buildings have expressed a desire to sell. The property needs very extensive and expensive renovation. We have felt it imperative to do something to revitalize this area. But I wish to give the entire Church the assurance that tithing funds have not and will not be used to acquire this property. Nor will they be used in developing it for commercial purposes.

Funds for this have come and will come from the commercial entities owned by the Church. These resources, together with the earnings of invested reserve funds, will accommodate this program.

Building of chapels and temples

I am pleased to report that we are able to go forward with the building of chapels. We are constructing about 400 new chapels a year to accommodate the growth in the membership of the Church. This is a significant and wonderful thing for which we are deeply grateful. We are also continuing to build temples across the earth and are pleased to report an increase in temple activity. This very important work, in behalf of the living and the dead, is a fundamental part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Increased family preparedness

We are pleased to note an increase in family preparedness among our people. This program, which has been advocated for more than 60 years, adds immeasurably to the security and well-being of the Latter-day Saints. Every family has a responsibility to provide for its own needs to the extent possible. We again urge our people to avoid unnecessary debt, to be modest in the financial obligations which they undertake, to set aside some cash against an emergency. We warn our people against "get rich" schemes and other entanglements which are nearly always designed to trap the gullible.

Volunteer service

I am constantly amazed at the vast amount of volunteer service which our people give. I am convinced that volunteer service is the Lord's way of accomplishing His work. The operation of wards and stakes and quorums, and the functions of the auxiliary organizations, all move forward under the direction of volunteers. The vast missionary program is dependent on volunteer service.

Additionally, we have a large number of older members who serve in a Church-service missionary capacity. More than 18,000 give all or a large part of their time to this work. We thank them for their dedicated service.

Progress of the Perpetual Education Fund

This conference marks the second anniversary of the establishment of the Perpetual Education Fund. I am pleased to report that this program is now going forward on a solid basis. Some 8,000 young men and women are now in training to improve their skills and their employment opportunities. On average, with the two years of education they are now receiving,

they are increasing their income some four and a half times. It is a miracle!

Increased faith and love for the Lord

And so I might go on. Suffice it to say, the Church is in good condition. I believe its affairs are prudently handled. Our people are growing in faith, in love for the Lord, and in adherence to His teachings.

These are difficult times. The economy is struggling. There is conflict in the world. But the Almighty is keeping His promise that He will bless those who walk in faith and righteousness before Him.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the way of peace. To the extent we follow it and incorporate it in our lives—to this extent will we be blessed and prospered. What a wonderful thing it is to be involved in this glorious work. Let us rejoice in our great opportunity. Let us serve with gladness.

May heaven's richest blessings rest upon you, my beloved associates. May faith grow in your hearts. May there be love and peace in your homes. May there be food upon your tables and clothing on your backs. May the smiles of heaven warm your hearts and bring comfort in times of trial. This is my prayer this morning as we open this great conference, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Praise to the Man."

President Faust

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, has just spoken to us, followed by the choir singing "Praise to the Man."

We shall now hear from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder David E. Sorenson of the Presidency of the Seventy. The choir and congregation will then sing "Now Let Us Rejoice."

At the conclusion of the singing, Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, will address us. She will be followed by Elder

Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing “Come unto Him.”

Elder Russell M. Nelson

In this day of computers, phones, and pagers, people communicate with one another better than ever before. Even so, good communication is often lacking. Recently while visiting a nursing care facility, I spoke with a woman about her family. She told me that she had three sons, two of whom visit her regularly.

“What about your third son?” I asked.

“I don’t know where he is,” she replied tearfully. “I haven’t heard from him for years. I don’t even know how many grandchildren I have.”

Why we pray

If such a mother yearns to hear from her sons, it is easy to see why a loving Father in Heaven wants to hear from His children.¹ Through prayer, we can show our love for God. And He has made it so easy. We may pray to Him any time. No special equipment is needed. We don’t even need to charge batteries or pay a monthly service fee.

Some people pray only when confronted with personal problems. Others don’t pray at all. A scripture makes this observation: “Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches, not to thank the Lord . . . for them.”²

Prophets have long told us to pray humbly and frequently.³

How to pray

Jesus taught us how.⁴ We pray to our Heavenly Father,⁵ in the name of Jesus Christ,⁶ by the power of the Holy Ghost.⁷

This is the “true order of prayer,”⁸ in contrast to “vain repetitions”⁹ or recitations given to “be seen of men.”¹⁰

Jesus revealed that we pray to a wise Father who knows what things we have need of, before we ask Him.¹¹

Mormon taught his son Moroni that we should pray “with all the energy of heart.”¹² Nephi exclaimed, “I pray continually for [my people] by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, . . . and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.”¹³

The sweet power of prayer can be intensified by fasting, on occasion, when appropriate to a particular need.¹⁴

Prayers can be offered even in silence. One can *think* a prayer, especially when words would interfere.¹⁵ We often kneel to pray; we may stand or be seated.¹⁶ Physical position is less important than is spiritual submission to God.

We close our prayers “in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”¹⁷ When we hear another’s prayer, we audibly add our “amen,” meaning, “That is my prayer too.”¹⁸

When to pray

When should we pray? The Lord said, “Search diligently, pray *always*, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good.”¹⁹

Alma said, “Counsel with the Lord in *all* thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God.”²⁰

We pray privately, with our families regularly, at mealtime, and in daily activities. Simply summarized, we are a praying people.

Personal experience with prayer

Many of us have had experiences with the sweet power of prayer. One of mine was shared with a stake patriarch from southern Utah. I first met him in my medical office more than 40 years ago, during the early pioneering days of surgery of the heart. This saintly soul suffered much because of a failing heart. He pleaded for help, thinking that his condition resulted from a damaged but repairable valve in his heart.

Extensive evaluation revealed that he had *two* faulty valves. While one could be helped surgically, the other could not. Thus, an operation was *not* advised. He received this news with deep disappointment.

Subsequent visits ended with the same advice. Finally, in desperation, he spoke to me with considerable emotion: "Dr. Nelson, I have prayed for help and have been directed to you. The Lord will not reveal to me *how* to repair that second valve, but He can reveal it to you. Your mind is so prepared. If you will operate upon me, the Lord will make it known to you what to do. Please perform the operation that *I* need, and pray for the help that *you* need."²¹

His great faith had a profound effect upon me. How could I turn him away again? Following a fervent prayer together, I agreed to try. In preparing for that fateful day, I prayed over and over again, but still did not know what to do for his leaking tricuspid valve. Even as the operation commenced,²² my assistant asked, "What are you going to do for that?"

I said, "I do not know."

We began the operation. After relieving the obstruction of the first valve,²³ we exposed the second valve. We found it to be intact but so badly dilated that it could

no longer function as it should. While examining this valve, a message was distinctly impressed upon my mind: *Reduce the circumference of the ring*. I announced that message to my assistant. "The valve tissue will be sufficient if we can effectively reduce the ring toward its normal size."

But how? We could not apply a belt as one would use to tighten the waist of oversized trousers. We could not squeeze with a strap as one would cinch a saddle on a horse. Then a picture came vividly to my mind, showing how stitches could be placed—to make a pleat here and a tuck there—to accomplish the desired objective. I still remember that mental image—complete with dotted lines where sutures should be placed. The repair was completed as diagrammed in my mind. We tested the valve and found the leak to be reduced remarkably. My assistant said, "It's a miracle."

I responded, "It's an answer to prayer."

The patient's recovery was rapid and his relief gratifying. Not only was he helped in a marvelous way, but surgical help for other people with similar problems had become a possibility. I take no credit. Praise goes to this faithful patriarch and to God, who answered our prayers. This faithful man lived for many more years and has since gone to his eternal glory.

Inquire of the Lord

When we pray, we should not presume to give counsel but should inquire of the Lord²⁴ and hearken to His counsel.²⁵ Joseph Smith's first prayer ushered in the Restoration of the gospel.²⁶ In 1833 he received the Word of Wisdom after asking the Lord for counsel.²⁷ The revelation on the priesthood received in 1978 by President Spencer W. Kimball came after intense inquiry.²⁸ Inspiration regarding the construction of smaller temples came after the pondering of President Gordon B. Hinckley.²⁹

Answers to prayers

Not all of our prayers will be answered as we might wish. Occasionally the answer will be no. We should not be surprised. Loving mortal parents do not say yes to every request of their children.³⁰

At a recent extended family home evening, our grandchildren were having a wonderful time. A six-year-old grandson became *very* upset when his father said it was time to go home. So what did this dear boy do? He came to me and said, “Grandfather, may I have your permission to disobey my father?”

I said, “No, sweetheart. One of life’s great lessons is to learn that happiness comes through obedience.³¹ Go home with your family, and you will be happy.” Though disappointed, he dutifully obeyed.

We should pray in accord with the will of our Heavenly Father.³² He wants to test us, to strengthen us, and to help us achieve our full potential. When the Prophet Joseph Smith was held in Liberty Jail, he pled for relief. His prayers were answered with an explanation: “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.”³³

Song of prayer

I have felt impressed to conclude this message on prayer with a prayer—presented as a hymn. The Lord has said that “the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me.”³⁴ The music comes from our book of *Hymns*,³⁵ for which I have written new words. With thanks to Craig Jessop, Mack Wilberg, and other dear friends in the Tabernacle Choir, we may hear that song of prayer. Brother Jessop, please:

Our Prayer to Thee

We pray to Thee, our Heavenly Father,
With grateful hearts and fond emotion.

We thank Thee for our great Exemplar—
Thy beloved and atoning Son—
Who gave Himself as sacred ransom,
That we could live again with Thee!
Our joy is full, our song so gladsome;
Renew our faith and hope in Thee.

We pray to Thee, our Heavenly Father,
With thankful hearts and adoration.
We thank Thee for our loving Savior,
Who redeemed us from death and sin;
He gave to us His truth to brighten
Our path, to help us walk His way,
To love and serve, to lift and lighten
The lives of all who will obey.

We pray to Thee, our Heavenly Father,
With gratitude and deep devotion
For loving faith and endless splendor—
Eternal glory—bound as one!
We pray for mercy and forgiveness
And hope to know Thy holy will.
We yearn for Thee, we plead in meekness,
Thy trust in us may we fulfill.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Many scriptures refer to those who were “slow to remember the Lord” (see Mosiah 9:3; 13:29; Helaman 12:5).
2. Helaman 13:22.
3. For examples, see Jeremiah 29:11–13; Joel 2:32; Philippians 4:6; 1 Nephi 15:8–11; Alma 37:37.
4. As Jesus wrought the Atonement, He maintained prayerful communication with His Father both in Gethsemane (see Luke 22:39–44) and on Calvary’s cross (see Luke 23:33–34, 46).
5. See Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2; 3 Nephi 13:9.
6. See Jacob 4:4–5; 3 Nephi 20:31; 27:9; Moses 5:8.
7. See Moroni 6:9; 10:4–5.

8. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 380.
9. Matthew 6:7.
10. Matthew 6:5.
11. See Matthew 6:8.
12. Moroni 7:48.
13. 2 Nephi 33:3; see also Jacob 3:1; Alma 31:38; Doctrine and Covenants 37:2.
14. See Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Mosiah 27:22–23; Alma 5:46; 3 Nephi 27:1; Doctrine and Covenants 88:76.
15. One of our hymns recounts that “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, / Uttered or unexpressed, / . . . The upward glancing of an eye / When none but God is near” (“Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*, no. 145).
16. As may be appropriate for the occasion.
17. For other helpful instruction, see Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 16–20; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 15–18.
18. See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (2000), 57: “amen. . . . Used at the end of a prayer or a statement to express assent or approval. [Middle English, from Old English, from Late Latin *āmēn*, from Greek, from Hebrew *'āmēn*, certainly, verily, from *'āman*, to be firm.]”
19. Doctrine and Covenants 90:24; italics added.
20. Alma 37:37; italics added. See also Mosiah 26:39; Alma 26:22. For comparable teaching from Paul, see 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
21. While his words may not have been quoted *verbatim*, this is an accurate representation of his declaration.
22. This operation was performed on 24 May 1960.
23. He had stenosis (narrowing) of his mitral valve, caused by an earlier attack of rheumatic fever.
24. The Lord said, “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge” (D&C 42:61). For an example, refer to section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord explained that “you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought” (verses 8–9). See also Jacob 4:10.
25. See Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 13:17–18; 1 Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 26:4–6; Omni 1:13; Doctrine and Covenants 41:1; 133:16.
26. See Joseph Smith—History 1:15–20.
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 89.
28. See Official Declaration 2.
29. See *Church News*, 1 Aug. 1998, 3, 12; 13 Mar. 1999, 9; 4 Mar. 2000, 7; 24 June 2000, 9.
30. Even the Son of God endured such an experience, “saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). The Father and the Son both knew what had to be done.
31. Regarding obedience to divine law, see Abraham 3:25. Regarding obedience to wise counsel from loving parents, see Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20.
32. See Helaman 10:4–5.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 25:12.
35. *Hymns*, no. 337; music composed by Joseph Parry; tune: Swansea.

Elder David E. Sorensen

Isn’t it amazing, the gifts of the Spirit that the Lord has given to Elder Nelson. His talents bless not only the Church, but the whole world.

A conflict over irrigation water

I’d like to speak today of forgiveness. I grew up in a small farming town where

water was the lifeblood of the community. I remember the people of our society constantly watching, worrying, and praying over the rain, irrigation rights, and water in general. Sometimes my children chide me; they say they never knew someone so preoccupied with rain. I tell them I suppose that's true because where I grew up the rain was more than a preoccupation. It was a matter of survival!

Under the stress and strain of our climate, sometimes people weren't always at their best. Occasionally neighbors would squabble over one farmer taking too long a turn from the irrigation ditch. That's how it started with two men who lived near our mountain pasture, whom I will call Chet and Walt. These two neighbors began to quarrel over water from the irrigation ditch they shared. It was innocent enough at first, but over the years the two men allowed their disagreements to turn into resentment and then arguments—even to the point of threats.

One July morning both men felt they were once again short of water. Each went to the ditch to see what had happened, each in his own mind reckoning the other had stolen his water. They arrived at the headgate at the same time. Angry words were exchanged; a scuffle ensued. Walt was a large man with great strength. Chet was small, wiry, and tenacious. In the heat of the scuffle, the shovels the men were carrying were used as weapons. Walt accidentally struck one of Chet's eyes with the shovel, leaving him blind in that eye.

Unwillingness to forgive leads to tragedy

Months and years passed, yet Chet could not forget nor forgive. The anger that he felt over losing his eye boiled inside him, and his hatred grew more intense. One day Chet went to his barn, took down the gun from its rack, got on his horse, and rode down to the headgate of the ditch. He put a dam in the ditch and

diverted the water away from Walt's farm, knowing that Walt would soon come to see what had happened. Then Chet slipped into the brush and waited. When Walt appeared, Chet shot him dead. Then he got on his horse, went back to his home, and called the sheriff to inform him that he had just shot Walt.

My father was asked to be on the jury that tried Chet for murder. Father disqualified himself because he was a longtime friend of both men and their families. Chet was tried and convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

After many years, Chet's wife came to my father and asked if he would sign a petition to the governor, asking for clemency for her husband, whose health was now broken after serving so many years in the state penitentiary. Father signed the petition. A few nights later, two of Walt's grown sons appeared at our door. They were very angry and upset. They said that because Father had signed the petition, many others had signed. They asked Father to have his name withdrawn from the petition. He said no. He felt that Chet was a broken and sick man. He had suffered these many years in prison for that terrible crime of passion. He wanted to see Chet have a decent funeral and burial beside his family.

Walt's sons whirled in anger and said, "If he is released from prison, we will see that harm comes to him and his family."

Chet was eventually released and allowed to come home to die with his family. Fortunately, there was no further violence between the families. My father often lamented how tragic it was that Chet and Walt, these two neighbors and boyhood friends, had fallen captive to their anger and let it destroy their lives. How tragic that the passion of the moment was allowed to escalate out of control—eventually taking the lives of both men—simply because two men could not forgive each other over a few shares of irrigation water.

Two responses to a snakebite

The Savior said, “Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him,”¹ thus commanding us to resolve our differences early on, lest the passions of the moment escalate into physical or emotional cruelty, and we fall captive to our anger.

Nowhere does this principle apply more than in our families. Your specific concern may not be water, but each of us on earth, living under the stress and strain of this celestial climate, will have reason—real or perceived—to take offense. How will we react? Will we take offense? Will we find fault? Will we let the passions of the moment overcome us?

President Brigham Young once compared being offended to a poisonous snakebite. He said that “there are two courses of action to follow when one is bitten by a rattlesnake. One may, in anger, fear, or vengefulness, pursue the creature and kill it. Or he may make full haste to get the venom out of his system.” He said, “If we pursue the latter course we will likely survive, but if we attempt to follow the former, we may not be around long enough to finish it.”²

Reduce criticism, resentment, and anger

Now let me take a moment here to note that we must take care in our families not to cause spiritual or emotional snakebites in the first place! In much of today’s popular culture, the virtues of forgiveness and kindness are belittled, while ridicule, anger, and harsh criticism are encouraged. If we are not careful, we can fall prey to these habits within our own homes and families and soon find ourselves criticizing our spouse, our children, our extended family members. Let us not hurt the ones we love the most by selfish criticism! In our families, small arguments and petty criticisms, if allowed to go unchecked, can poison relationships and escalate into estrangements, even abuse and

divorce. Instead, just like we learned with the poisonous venom, we must “make full haste” to reduce arguments, eliminate ridicule, do away with criticism, and remove resentment and anger. We cannot afford to let such dangerous passions ruminate—not even one day.

Joseph of Egypt forgives his brothers

Contrast Walt and Chet’s tragic story with the example of Joseph of Egypt. Joseph’s brothers jealously hated him. They plotted to take his life and finally sold him as a slave. Joseph was carried into Egypt and struggled for years to rise from slavery. During these challenging times, Joseph might have condemned his brothers and sworn revenge. He might have soothed his pain by scheming to get even someday. But he did not.

In time, Joseph became ruler over all of Egypt, second in command only to Pharaoh. During a devastating famine, Joseph’s brothers traveled to Egypt for food. Not recognizing Joseph, they bowed down to him because of his high position. Surely at that moment Joseph had the power to exact revenge. He might have put his brethren in prison or sentenced them to death. Instead he confirmed his forgiveness. He said:

“I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither . . .

“And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity . . . and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

“So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.”³

Joseph’s will to forgive changed bitterness to love.

Forgiveness does not require tolerating evil

I would like to make it clear that forgiveness of sins should not be confused with tolerating evil. In fact, in the Joseph

Smith Translation the Lord said, “Judge righteous judgment.”⁴

The Savior asks us to forsake and combat evil in all its forms, and although we must forgive a neighbor who injures us, we should still work constructively to prevent that injury from being repeated. A woman who is abused should not seek revenge, but neither should she feel that she cannot take steps to prevent further abuse. A businessperson treated unfairly in a transaction should not hate the person who was dishonest but could take appropriate steps to remedy the wrong. Forgiveness does not require us to accept or tolerate evil. It does not require us to ignore the wrong that we see in the world around us or in our own lives. But as we fight against sin, we must not allow hatred or anger to control our thoughts or actions.

Forgiveness brings freedom, a better future

The Savior said, “Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.”⁵

This is not to say that forgiveness is easy. When someone has hurt us or those we care about, that pain can almost be overwhelming. It can feel as if the pain or the injustice is the most important thing in the world and that we have no choice but to seek vengeance. But Christ, the Prince

of Peace, teaches us a better way. It can be very difficult to forgive someone the harm they’ve done us, but when we do, we open ourselves up to a better future. No longer does someone else’s wrongdoing control our course. When we forgive others, it frees us to choose how we will live our own lives. Forgiveness means that problems of the past no longer dictate our destinies, and we can focus on the future with God’s love in our hearts.

May the seeds of unforgivingness that haunted my neighbors never be allowed to take root in our homes. May we pray to our Heavenly Father to help us overcome foolish pride, resentment, and pettiness. May He help us to forgive and love, so we may be friends with our Savior, others, and ourselves. “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 5:25.
2. As reported by Marion D. Hanks, in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 16; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 21.
3. Genesis 45:4–5, 7–8.
4. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:1.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 64:9.
6. Colossians 3:13.

The choir and congregation sang
“Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Sister Kathleen H. Hughes

The woman at the well

Early in Christ’s ministry, He traveled from Jerusalem to His boyhood home of Nazareth, in Galilee. He passed through Samaria and, weary from His journey, stopped to rest at Jacob’s ancient well. As

Jesus waited and His disciples sought food in a nearby town, a Samaritan woman approached the well. You know the story. When Jesus asked for a drink, she was surprised that a Jew would make such a request of her. For centuries, Jews and Samaritans had considered themselves

enemies. But Christ told her that if she understood whom it was she was talking to, she would ask *Him* for water—living water, water that would satisfy her thirst forever. She didn’t understand, of course, and so He explained:

“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13–14).

The Samaritan woman liked the idea of never having to drink again. Certainly she wouldn’t miss the daily labor of carrying the heavy water jars from the well to her home. But when Christ testified to her that He was the Messiah and when the Spirit confirmed to her that it was true, she began to comprehend that Jesus was speaking of greater truths. She left the well water behind and hurried away to seek others who might come and listen. I doubt, however, at least at that point, that she fully understood—or whether we fully understand—what it means to have a wellspring of living water within us.

The healing power of living water

Living water heals. It nourishes and sustains. It brings peace and joy.

A woman I know was struggling with anger toward someone who had hurt her and her family. Though she told her children not to become embittered and resentful, she fought those feelings herself. After weeks of entreating her Father in Heaven, she finally felt a change. She related: “One day, in the midst of my nearly constant prayers, the healing came. I felt a physical sensation spread through my body. After, I felt a sense of security and peace. I knew that regardless of what happened, my family and I would be all right. The anger left me and so did my desire for retaliation.”

The living water is the gospel of Jesus Christ; its communicator is the Holy Ghost. My friend knew what was right. She had said the appropriate words to her family. But only when she humbled herself enough to drink of the water—to feel the Holy Spirit—could she begin to heal.

As I have met with many women this last year—and their priesthood leaders—I have heard numerous accounts of Christ’s healing power. There is so much suffering in mortality, so many causes for pain. I know people who have sent loved ones into harm’s way and who daily pray for their safety in battle. I talk to parents who are frightened for their children, aware of the temptations they face. I have dear friends who are suffering from the ravaging effects of chemotherapy. I know single parents, abandoned by spouses, who are rearing children alone. I have dealt myself with the debilitating effects of depression. But I have learned from my own experience, and I learn from those I meet, that we are never left to our own resources. We are never abandoned. A wellspring of goodness, of strength and confidence is within us, and when we listen with a feeling of trust, we are raised up. We are healed. We not only survive, but we love life. We laugh; we enjoy; we go forward with faith.

The nourishing power of healing water

The living water also nourishes. I testify to you that just as He promises, Christ comes to all who are heavy laden; He gives us rest (see Matthew 11:28). He sustains us when we are weary. A wellspring is a flowing well, offering continual refreshment—if we drink of it. Pride can destroy its effects, as can mere inattention. But those who drink deeply not only become whole themselves, but they become a fountain to others as one spirit nurtures and feeds another.

Last year a dear family friend passed away. Lucile was 89 years old and had

been a widow for more than 20 years. She was not a rich woman, she was not famous, and most of the world knew nothing of her passing. But her family knew. Her neighbors knew. The members of her ward knew. For all who had experienced her love, her death had left the world a diminished place. During her years as a widow, Lucile had endured difficult challenges, including the death of a beloved grandson and infirmities brought on by age. But Lucile continued to nourish everyone she knew with her spirit, with her baked goods, with her quilts and afghans, with her humor and goodwill. And she loved to work in the temple. One spring day in 1981, she wrote in her journal:

“This morning at 3:30 A.M., as I was walking up the path to the temple, I watched the flag gently blowing in the breeze and looked at the beautiful sky and thought how happy I was to be there. I felt sad for all the people who [were] sleeping and missing the awakening of a beautiful day.”

Most of us don’t think the world is “awakening” at 3:30 in the morning, and we’re perfectly happy to roll over in bed about then and allow Lucile to feel sorry for us. But what an attitude! Only a flow of goodness from within could explain it. Did she possess this purity of spirit at 15, at 25, or even 55? I don’t know. In most cases, it probably takes a lifetime of listening to the Holy Ghost before we know God’s voice so well and before we trust in the living waters enough to taste them throughout the entire day—especially a day that begins at 3:30 A.M. But I believe the living waters sustained Lucile during those long years when she might have given way to self-pity, and her life, her spirit, became nourishment to everyone she knew.

Living water brings peace and joy

The living waters can bring peace and joy even when the wellspring within us

seems to have dried. Recently I heard of a woman whose son, suffering from emotional illness, died unexpectedly. The family was devastated. The mother couldn’t imagine that she could ever know happiness again. But she was blessed by the service of a young woman, one of her former Laurel girls—now a young Relief Society sister and her visiting teacher—who said, “You helped me; now I’ll help you—and we’ll get through this together.” Peace, even joy, began to return to her life.

It may take a lifetime—and longer—to refine our spirits fully, but the living water is available to all, including the young. I’m inspired when I watch young women of the Church, after receiving spiritual training from childhood, enter the Relief Society and immediately bring added strength to more experienced women. I’m overjoyed when I watch those same young women realize how much they can learn from women older than themselves. Peace comes to us from the Lord, but we can help each other feel that peace as we share our burdens and our happiness.

Christ’s promise is simple and sublime: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Brothers and sisters, turmoil is raging all about us. Economies are in distress; families are struggling; we are living in, as President Hinckley has said, “perilous times” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 87; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 72). But the living waters still offer peace and joy. When we live righteously, when we have done all we can do, one of the gifts we receive is confidence. The Lord tells us, “Be still and know that I am God” (D&C 101:16). In the midst of chaos, we must pause. We must listen for the Spirit that tells us, “All is well!” (“Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30) just as the early Saints had to do. There is cause to be concerned, but there is greater reason to be at peace.

The Samaritan woman looked into the face of Christ, listened to His voice, and recognized Him at a time when most others rejected all He taught. We know Him too, or we can, if we allow His heal-

ing power, His nourishing strength, His peace and joy, to flow through us like “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). That we may do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Robert D. Hales

The Savior's peace in troubled times

After teaching the multitude, Jesus, with His disciples, set sail for the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was night, and the Savior rested comfortably near the stern, asleep on a pillow. In time “there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship.” Terrified, the disciples awakened Him: “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”¹ His answer was characteristically calm: “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?”² “And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”³

He who had created the earth was again commanding the elements.⁴ In wonderment, His disciples asked, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”⁵

We are living through turbulent times. A great storm of evil has come upon the earth. The winds of wickedness howl about us; the waves of war beat against our ship. As Paul wrote to Timothy:

“In the last days perilous times shall come.

“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, . . .

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”⁶

It is true that ominous clouds gather around us, but just as the Savior’s words brought peace to the Apostles in the boat, they bring peace to us today: “And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars,

be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.”⁷ “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.”⁸

Help from the still, small voice

To Elijah, Jehovah said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” Elijah obeyed, and after a storm of wind and earthquakes and fire, he was finally visited with “a still small voice.” To Elijah, who had hid himself inside a cave, the Lord asked, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” And Elijah answered, “Because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” But the Lord had important work for Elijah to do, and therefore “said unto him, Go, return on thy way.”⁹ So Elijah went.

We too must come forth from our *secure* caves, for we have important work to do. Through the still, small voice of His Spirit, the Lord will protect us, help us, and guide us.

The Lord’s lessons to the brother of Jared

Remember that He taught the brother of Jared how to construct vessels for his family to help them safely traverse the vast ocean waters, to preserve them against winds and waves, and to bring them to the promised land. These vessels were unusual in their design but very safe:

“And it came to pass that when they were buried in the deep there was no water that could hurt them, . . . and no mon-

ster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them.”¹⁰

However, these vessels had no light. This concerned the brother of Jared. He did not want his family to make their journey in darkness; and so, rather than waiting to be commanded, he took his concern to the Lord. “And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?”¹¹

The brother of Jared’s answer to this question required diligent effort on his part. He climbed Mount Shelem “and did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones.”¹² He then asked the Lord to touch those stones so that they would bring forth light.

As parents and leaders, we must remember that “it is not meet that [the Lord] should command in all things.”¹³ Like the brother of Jared, we must carefully consider the needs of our family members, make a plan to meet those needs, and then take our plan to the Lord in prayer. This will require faith and effort on our part, but He will help us as we seek His assistance and do His will.

After his experience with the Lord, the brother of Jared continued to diligently prepare himself for the journey ahead.¹⁴ So too must we hearken to the teachings of our prophets. The living prophets have counseled us time and again to put our lives in order—to eliminate debt, to store food and other essential items, to pay our tithing, to obtain appropriate education, and to live the commandments. Have we obeyed these essential instructions?

Children need to see us being faithful

As we look into the eyes of our children and grandchildren, we see the doubt and fear of our times. Wherever these precious ones go in the world, they hear about unemployment, poverty, war, immorality, and crime. They wonder, “How can we cope with these problems?”

To find answers, they look back into our eyes and listen to our words. Do they

hear us speaking faithfully and hopefully, despite the tribulations of our times?

They need to see us continuing to pray and study the scriptures together, to hold family home evening and family councils, to serve faithfully in our Church callings, to attend the temple regularly, and to be obedient to our covenants. When they see our steadfastness in keeping the commandments, their fears will subside and their confidence in the Lord will increase.

By showing our faith through tribulation, we assure them that the fury of the adversary is not fatal. Jesus prayed to His Father on our behalf: “Not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”¹⁵ That prayer will be answered in Heavenly Father’s time and season, according to our faith.

Being faithful in times of trial

In the meantime there is meaning and purpose in our earthly challenges. Consider the Prophet Joseph Smith: throughout his life he faced daunting opposition—illness, accident, poverty, misunderstanding, false accusation, and even persecution. One might be tempted to ask, “Why didn’t the Lord protect His prophet from such obstacles, provide him with unlimited resources, and stop up the mouths of his accusers?” The answer is that each of us must go through certain experiences to become more like our Savior. In the school of mortality, the tutor is often pain and tribulation, but the lessons are meant to refine and bless us and strengthen us, not to destroy us. Said the Lord to faithful Joseph:

“My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment.”¹⁶

“If thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; . . .

know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.”¹⁷

Despite the many tribulations in the Prophet Joseph’s life, great things were brought to pass for the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days. Joseph came to understand and has taught us that when he was struggling with a challenge, the Lord did not let him perish. Similarly, tests of our faith are priceless opportunities to discover how deeply the Master cares about the welfare of our souls to help us endure to the end.

Temple ordinances help us endure

In our day, the steady arm of the Lord reaches us through the ordinances of His holy temples. Said the Prophet Joseph to the early Saints in Nauvoo, “You need an endowment, brethren, in order that you may be prepared and able to overcome all things.”¹⁸ How right he was! Being blessed with the temple covenants and endowed with power made it possible for the Latter-day Saints to endure tribulation with faith. At the end of her own pioneer journey, Sarah Rich recorded, “If it had not been for the faith and knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple . . . our journey would have been like . . . taking a leap in the dark.”¹⁹

The Savior’s example in affliction

I am moved by the extent of the tribulation in the Savior’s experience. Even though He was the Only Begotten of the Father, cunning men sought to take His life from the very beginning. Throughout His ministry, a storm of rumors, lies, and persecutions followed Him wherever He went.

I am especially impressed as I consider the week leading to His death. The chief priests challenged His authority, tried to trap Him, and twice conspired to kill Him. In Gethsemane, while His dis-

ciples slept, He suffered the sins of all mankind and bled from every pore. He was betrayed, arrested, questioned, struck, spat upon, and beaten. After interrogation by the ruling council, He was mocked by Herod and finally taken to Pilate, where He was made to stand before an angry mob. Whipped and crowned with thorns, He was forced to carry His cross to Golgotha. Nails were driven into His hands and feet. His body was raised up between common thieves. Soldiers cast lots for His earthly possessions, and vinegar was given to quench His thirst. After six hours,²⁰ He commended His spirit into the hands of His Father, gave up the ghost, and died.

Seeing Jesus’ trials with an eye of faith

When we observe the last week of the Savior’s life from our earthly perspective, our first impression may be one of suffering and destruction. We may see only the Savior’s mother and others weeping at the cross, soldiers afraid, the earth in great commotion, rocks broken up, the veil of the temple rent in twain, and three hours of darkness covering the land. A similar scene of storms and destruction unfolded in the New World. In short, we see the terrible tempest raging.

But look again—this time through the eye of faith.

In the last, most agonizing weeks of His life, consider that Jesus taught, testified, lifted, blessed, and strengthened those around Him. He raised Lazarus from the dead, taught about His Father, set the temple in order, gave several parables, witnessed the widow offering her mite, instructed His disciples about the signs of His Second Coming, visited the house of Simon the leper, instituted the sacrament, washed the feet of the Apostles, and taught His disciples to love one another. He testified of His divinity as the Son of God and taught of the Comforter—the Holy Ghost. In His great Intercessory Prayer, He prayed to His Father for His Apostles

and all who believe on their words, “that they might have [His] joy fulfilled in themselves.”²¹

In His darkest hour, the light of peace and joy did not fade. It grew brighter! After His death, He appeared to Mary Magdalene. What joy must have been felt that morning as the news spread: “He is risen”!²² In time He came to the women on the road; to Cleopas and a disciple who were traveling to Emmaus; to the Apostles and disciples in the upper room; to Thomas, who doubted; and to others. Again, there was joy and rejoicing in the Atonement and the Resurrection.²³

The Savior’s visit to the spirit world

But this was not all. In vision, President Joseph F. Smith—a prophet, seer, and revelator—saw the Savior’s visit to the spirit world:

“There were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality. . . .

“All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, . . .

“. . . [And] they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand.

“They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death.”

These faithful spirits knew that shortly “their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a *fulness* of joy.

“[And] while this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death,

the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful.”²⁴

Jesus can bring joy in turbulent times

My brothers and sisters, however dark conditions may seem in this world today, whatever the storms we are facing personally, in our homes, and in our families, this joy can be ours now. Sometimes we don’t understand death, illness, mental and physical disabilities, personal tragedies, war, and other conflict. Some of these are a necessary part of our mortal probation. Others, as Enoch foresaw, are part of the preparation for the Savior’s Second Coming, when “the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but,” said the Lord, “my people will I preserve.” And when Enoch saw all these things, he “received a fulness of joy.”²⁵

On this morning, during this season of the Savior’s birth and Resurrection, I bear special witness with joy and rejoicing that He did come into this world, suffered for our sins, and will return again. Our faith in Him and obedience to His commandments will bring “a perfect brightness of hope”²⁶ and dispel the darkness and gloom of despair in these troubled times. The One who had power to calm the elements of earth has power to calm our souls, to give us refuge from the storm: “Peace, be still.”²⁷

I so testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Mark 4:37–38.
2. Matthew 8:26.
3. Mark 4:39.
4. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 309.
5. Mark 4:41.
6. 2 Timothy 3:1–2, 5.
7. Mark 13:7.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 38:30.
9. See 1 Kings 19:11–15.
10. Ether 6:7, 10.
11. Ether 2:23.
12. Ether 3:1.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 58:26.
14. See Ether 6:4.
15. John 17:15.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.
18. *History of the Church*, 2:309.
19. Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, “Autobiography, 1885–1893,” Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 66.
20. See *Jesus the Christ*, 660.
21. John 17:13.
22. Matthew 28:6.
23. See “New Testament Times at a Glance: The Savior’s Final Week,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2003, 26–29.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 138:12, 14–18; italics added.
25. Moses 7:61, 67.

26. 2 Nephi 31:20.
27. Mark 4:39.

The choir sang “Come unto Him.”

President Faust

As you leave the conference, we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

We express our appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning.

President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following President Monson’s remarks, the choir will sing “Arise, O God, and Shine.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Gerald N. Lund of the Seventy, and this conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President Thomas S. Monson

In search of treasure

When I was a boy I enjoyed reading *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. I also saw adventure movies where several individuals had separate pieces of a well-worn map which led the way to buried treasure if only the pieces could be found and put together.

I recall listening to a 15-minute radio program each weekday afternoon. The program of which I speak was *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*. It began with the jingle, “Have you tried Wheaties, the best breakfast food in the land?” Then, in a voice filled with mystery, there emanated from the radio the message, “We now join Jack and Betty as they approach the fabulous secret entry to the elephants’ burial ground, where a treasure is concealed. But wait; danger lurks on the path ahead.”

Nothing could tear me away from this program. It was as though I were leading

the search for the hidden treasure of precious ivory.

At another time and in a different setting, the Savior of the world spoke of treasure. In His Sermon on the Mount He declared:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”¹

The promised reward was not a treasure of ivory, gold, or silver. Neither did it consist of acres of land or a portfolio of stocks and bonds. The Master spoke of riches within the grasp of all—even joy unspeakable here and eternal happiness hereafter.

Today I have chosen to provide the three pieces of your treasure map to guide you to your eternal happiness. They are:

1. Learn from the past.
2. Prepare for the future.
3. Live in the present.

Let us consider each segment of the map.

Learn from the past

First, learn from the past.

Each of us has a heritage—whether from pioneer forebears, later converts, or others who helped to shape our lives. This heritage provides a foundation built of sacrifice and faith. Ours is the privilege and responsibility to build on such firm and stable footings.

Selling a treasured violin

A story written by Karen Nolen, which appeared in the *New Era* in 1974, tells of a Benjamin Landart who, in 1888, was 15 years old and an accomplished violinist. Living on a farm in northern Utah with his mother and seven brothers and sisters was sometimes a challenge to Benjamin, as he had less time than he would have liked to play his violin. Occasionally his mother would lock up the violin until he had his farm chores done, so great was the temptation for Benjamin to play it.

In late 1892 Benjamin was asked to travel to Salt Lake to audition for a place with the territorial orchestra. For him, this was a dream come true. After several weeks of practicing and prayers, he went to Salt Lake in March of 1893 for the much anticipated audition. When he heard Benjamin play, the conductor, a Mr. Dean, told Benjamin he was the most accomplished violinist he had heard west of Denver. He was told to report to Denver for rehearsals in the fall and learned that he would be earning enough to keep himself, with some left over to send home.

A week after Benjamin received the good news, however, his bishop called him

into his office and asked if he couldn't put off playing with the orchestra for a couple of years. He told Benjamin that before he started earning money there was something he owed the Lord. He then asked Benjamin to accept a mission call.

Benjamin felt that giving up his chance to play in the territorial orchestra would be almost more than he could bear, but he also knew what his decision should be. He promised the bishop that if there were any way to raise the money for him to serve, he would accept the call.

When Benjamin told his mother about the call, she was overjoyed. She told him that his father had always wanted to serve a mission but had been killed before that opportunity had come to him. However, when they discussed the financing of the mission, her face clouded over. Benjamin told her he would not allow her to sell any more of their land. She studied his face for a moment and then said, "Ben, there is a way we can raise the money. This family [has] one thing that is of great enough value to send you on your mission. You will have to sell your violin."

Ten days later, on March 23, 1893, Benjamin wrote in his journal: "I awoke this morning and took my violin from its case. All day long I played the music I love. In the evening when the light grew dim and I could see to play no longer, I placed the instrument in its case. It will be enough. Tomorrow I leave [for my mission]."

Forty-five years later, on June 23, 1938, Benjamin wrote in his journal: "The greatest decision I ever made in my life was to give up something I dearly loved to the God I loved even more. He has never forgotten me for it."²

Learn from the past.

Prepare for the future

Second, prepare for the future.

We live in a changing world. Technology has altered nearly every aspect of our lives. We must cope with these advances—

even these cataclysmic changes—in a world of which our forebears never dreamed.

Remember the promise of the Lord: “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.”³
Fear is a deadly enemy of progress.

It is necessary to prepare and to plan so we don’t fritter away our lives. Without a goal, there can be no real success. One of the best definitions of success I have ever heard goes something like this: Success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal. Someone has said the trouble with not having a goal is that you can spend your life running up and down the field and never crossing the goal line.

Years ago there was a romantic and fanciful ballad that contained the words, “Wishing will make it so / Just keep on wishing / And care will go.”⁴ I want to state here and now that wishing will not replace thorough preparation to meet the trials of life. Preparation is hard work but absolutely essential for our progress.

Our journey into the future will not be a smooth highway which stretches from here to eternity. Rather, there will be forks and turnings in the road, to say nothing of the unanticipated bumps. We must pray daily to a loving Heavenly Father, who wants each of us to succeed in life.

Prepare for the future.

Live in the present

Third, live in the present.

Sometimes we let our thoughts of tomorrow take up too much of today. Daydreaming of the past and longing for the future may provide comfort but will not take the place of living in the present. This is the day of our opportunity, and we must grasp it.

Professor Harold Hill, in Meredith Willson’s *The Music Man*, cautioned, “You pile up enough tomorrows, and you’ll find you’ve collected a lot of empty yesterdays.”

There is no tomorrow to remember if we don’t do something today, and to live

most fully today, we must do that which is of greatest importance. Let us not procrastinate those things which matter most.

Every day is a special occasion

I recently read the account of a man who, just after the passing of his wife, opened her dresser drawer and found an item of clothing she had purchased when they visited the eastern part of the United States nine years earlier. She had not worn it but was saving it for a special occasion. Now, of course, that occasion would never come.

In relating the experience to a friend, the husband said, “Don’t save something only for a special occasion. Every day in your life is a special occasion.”

That friend later said those words changed her life. They helped her to cease putting off the things most important to her. Said she, “Now I spend more time with my family. I use crystal glasses every day. I’ll wear new clothes to go to the supermarket if I feel like it. The words ‘some-day’ and ‘one day’ are fading from my vocabulary. Now I take the time to call my relatives and closest friends. I’ve called old friends to make peace over past quarrels. I tell my family members how much I love them. I try not to delay or postpone anything that could bring laughter and joy into our lives. And each morning, I say to myself that this could be a special day. Each day, each hour, each minute is special.”

A wonderful example of this philosophy was shared by Arthur Gordon many years ago in a national magazine. He wrote:

“When I was around thirteen and my brother ten, Father had promised to take us to the circus. But at lunchtime there was a phone call; some urgent business required his attention downtown. We braced ourselves for disappointment. Then we heard him say [into the phone], ‘No, I won’t be down. It’ll have to wait.’

"When he came back to the table, Mother smiled. 'The circus keeps coming back, you know,' [she said].

"I know," said Father. 'But childhood doesn't.'"⁵

Finding joy in the journey

Elder Monte J. Brough of the First Quorum of the Seventy tells of a summer at his childhood home in Randolph, Utah, when he and his younger brother, Max, decided to build a tree house in a large tree in the backyard. They made plans for the most wonderful creation of their lives. They gathered building materials from all over the neighborhood and carried them up to a part of the tree where two branches provided an ideal location for the house. It was difficult, and they were anxious to complete their work. The vision of the finished tree house provided tremendous motivation for them to complete the project.

They worked all summer, and finally in the fall just before school began for the new year, their house was completed. Elder Brough said he will never forget the feelings of joy and satisfaction which were theirs when they finally were able to enjoy the fruit of their work. They sat in the tree house, looked around for a few minutes, climbed down from the tree—and never returned. The completed project, as wonderful as it was, could not hold their interest for even one day. In other words, the process of planning, gathering, building, and working—not the completed project—provided the enduring satisfaction and pleasure they had experienced.

Let us relish life as we live it and, as did Elder Brough and his brother, Max, find joy in the journey.

Do not postpone chances to show affection

The old adage "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today" is doubly important when it comes to expressing

our love and affection—in word and in deed—to family members and friends. Said author Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone."⁶

A poet set to verse the sorrow of opportunities forever lost. I quote a portion:

Around the corner I have a friend,
In this great city that has no end;
Yet days go by, and weeks rush on,
And before I know it, a year is gone,
And I never see my old friend's face,
For Life is a swift and terrible race. . . .
But to-morrow comes—and to-morrow
goes,

And the distance between us grows and
grows.

Around the corner!—yet miles away . . .
"Here's a telegram, sir,"
"Jim died to-day."

And that's what we get, and deserve in
the end:

Around the corner, a vanished friend.⁷

Visiting a cherished friend

Just a little over a year ago, I determined that I would not put off any longer a visit with a dear friend whom I hadn't seen for many years. I had been meaning to visit him in California but just had not gotten around to it.

Bob Biggers and I met when we were both in the Classification Division at the United States Naval Training Center in San Diego, California, toward the close of World War II. We were good friends from the beginning. He visited in Salt Lake once before he married, and we remained friends through correspondence from the time I was discharged in 1946. My wife, Frances, and I have exchanged Christmas cards every year with Bob and his wife, Grace.

Finally, at the beginning of January 2002, I scheduled a stake conference visit to Whittier, California, where Bob lives. I telephoned my friend, now 80 years old,

and arranged for Frances and me to meet him and Grace, that we might reminisce concerning former days.

We had a delightful visit. I took with me a number of photographs which had been taken when we were in the Navy together over 55 years earlier. We identified the men we knew and provided each other an update on their whereabouts as best we could. Although not a member of our Church, Bob remembered going to a sacrament meeting with me those long years before when we were stationed in San Diego.

As Frances and I said our good-byes to Bob and Grace, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and joy at having finally made the effort to see once again a friend who had been cherished from afar throughout the years.

One day each of us will run out of tomorrows. Let us not put off what is most important.

Live in the present.

Lay up treasures in heaven

Your treasure map is now in place:
Learn from the past, prepare for the future, live in the present.

I conclude where I began. From our Lord and Savior:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”⁸

My brothers and sisters, from the depths of my soul I bear you my personal witness: God is our Father; His Son is our Savior and Redeemer; we are led by a prophet for our time, even President Gordon B. Hinckley.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 6:19–21.
2. See “Benjamin: Son of the Right Hand,” *New Era*, May 1974, 34–37.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 38:30.
4. “Wishing Will Make It So,” lyrics by B. G. DeSylva.
5. *A Touch of Wonder* (1974), 77–78.
6. In Gorton Carruth and Eugene Ehrlich, comp., *The Harper Book of American Quotations* (1988), 173.
7. Charles Hanson Towne, “Around the Corner,” in *Poems That Live Forever*, sel. Hazel Felleman (1965), 128.
8. Matthew 6:19–21.

The choir sang “Arise, O God, and Shine.”

Elder Gerald N. Lund offered the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second general session of the 173rd Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center on Saturday, April 5, 2003, at 2:00 p.m. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music for this session was provided by a combined choir from Brigham Young University. Ronald Staheli and Rosalind

Hall directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe was the organist.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

Brothers and sisters, we welcome you to this, the second general session of the

173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings to all who are in attendance or who are participating by means of television, cable, radio, or the Internet, and to the many who are watching in stake centers in various parts of the world where the conference is being carried by satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be by a combined choir from Brigham Young University, under the direction of Ronald Staheli and Rosalind Hall, with Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing "If You Could Hie to Kolob." Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder Donald L. Staheli of the Seventy.

The choir sang "If You Could Hie to Kolob."

Elder Donald L. Staheli offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing "I Stand All Amazed." President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will then present the General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church for a sustaining vote. Brother Wesley L. Jones, managing director of Church Auditing, will then read the Auditing Department Report. He will be followed by Brother F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, who will present the statistical report of the Church for the year 2002.

The choir sang "I Stand All Amazed."

The Sustaining of Church Officers

President James E. Faust

My brothers and sisters, President Hinckley has requested that I now present to you the General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church for your sustaining vote.

It is proposed that we sustain Gordon Bitner Hinckley as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Thomas Spencer Monson as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and James Esdras Faust as Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Those in favor may manifest it. Those opposed, if any, may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Boyd Ken-

neth Packer as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and the following as members of that quorum: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, David B. Haight, Neal A. Maxwell, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, and Henry B. Eyring. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. All in favor, please manifest it. Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

In view of his announced appointment as president of Brigham Young University, it is proposed that we release Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr. as a member of the

Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy and as general president of the Sunday School. All who wish to join with us in doing so, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we release J. Devn Cornish as an Area Authority Seventy because of his call as a mission president. All in favor, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Elder Merrill J. Bateman as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy and as general president of the Sunday School, with John H. Groberg and Val R. Christensen to remain as counselors. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Elder Bruce D. Porter as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and Elders Mervyn B. Arnold, Shirley D. Christensen, Clate W. Mask Jr., William W. Parmley, and W. Douglas Shumway as new members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as Area Authority Seventies:

D. Fraser Bullock, Luis G. Chaverri, Ronaldo da Costa, Stanley G. Ellis, Randy

D. Funk, José A. García, Robert H. Garff, Julio G. Gaviola, Francisco I. Gímenez, Carlos A. Godoy, S. Horacio Guzmán, Yu Chen Ho, Beaver T. Ho Ching, Robert Koch, G. Steven Laney, Barry Lee, Miguel A. Lee, Kuen Ling, Lamont W. Moon, Alexander A. Odume, Adesina J. Olukanni, Fernando D. Ortega, Antonio R. Oyola, Adilson de Paula Parrella, Luigi S. Peloni, Rafael E. Pino, Gelson Pizzirani, Gerold Roth, A. Kim Smith, W. Blake Sonne, Ronald A. Stone, Subandriyo, Jeffrey C. Swinton, Donald P. Tenney, José L. Torres, Pita R. Vamanrav, Perry M. Webb. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies as presently constituted. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed may manifest it.

It appears that the sustaining has been unanimous in the affirmative.

Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your continued faith and prayers.

We shall now ask the newly called members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy to take their places on the stand.

Church Auditing Department Report

Wesley L. Jones

To the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Dear Brethren: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints maintains an auditing department, which performs its work independently from all other Church departments and operations. The managing director of the Church Auditing Department reports directly and regularly to the First Presidency. Church Auditing Department staff consist of certified public accountants, certified internal auditors, certified information systems auditors, and other qualified, credentialed professionals.

By charge from the First Presidency, the Church Auditing Department has authority to audit all Church departments and operations worldwide. The Church Auditing Department has access to all records, personnel, properties, and systems needed to audit Church contributions, expenditures, and resources. Professional auditing standards govern the performance of audit work. Risk is the primary factor guiding the selection of audits.

The Council on the Disposition of the Tithes is responsible for, and for 2002 authorized, the expenditure of Church funds. This council is composed of the First Pres-

idency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Presiding Bishopric, as prescribed by revelation. Under direction of this council, contributions and expenditures were controlled through the Church's Budget and Finance Departments. Administration of contributions received and budgeted expenditures was audited and reported.

Based on our audits, the Church Auditing Department is of the opinion that, in all material respects, contributions received and funds expended during the year ended December 31, 2002, have been managed in accordance with approved budget guidelines and established Church policies and procedures.

The financial activities of Church-affiliated organizations, which are oper-

ated separately from the Church, were not audited by the Church Auditing Department in 2002. These organizations include, among others, Deseret Management Corporation, its subsidiaries, and the Church's institutions of higher education, including Brigham Young University. Independent public accounting firms audited the financial statements and corresponding control activities of these organizations. Nevertheless, the Church Auditing Department did verify that appropriate reporting of these firms' audit results occurred with each organization's audit committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Auditing Department
Wesley L. Jones
Managing Director

Church Statistical Report

F. Michael Watson

Brothers and sisters, the First Presidency has issued the following report concerning the growth and status of the Church as of December 31, 2002:

Church units

Stakes	2,602
Districts	641
Missions	335
Wards and branches	26,143

Church membership

Total membership	11,721,548
Increase in children of record	
during 2002	81,132
Converts baptized during 2002 ..	283,138

Missionaries

Full-time missionaries	61,638
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Temples

Temples dedicated during 2002	7
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(Snowflake Arizona, Lubbock Texas, Monterrey Mexico, Campinas Brazil, Asunción Paraguay, Nauvoo Illinois, and The Hague Netherlands)

Temples rededicated during 2002 2
(Freiberg Germany and
Monticello Utah)

Temples in operation 114

Prominent members who have passed away since last April

Minnie Preece Burton, widow of Elder Theodore M. Burton, former Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and member of the Seventy; *Melba Parker Hill*, widow of Elder George R. Hill III, former member of the Seventy; *Bonnie Lee Adamson Caldwell*, wife of Elder C. Max Caldwell, former member of the Seventy; *Gertrude Ryberg Garff*, former counselor in the Relief Society general presidency; *Walter Joshua Eldredge Jr.*, former Young Men general president; *Mayola Miltenberger*, former secretary-treasurer of the Relief Society general presidency and board.

President Monson

We have heard Brother Wesley L. Jones, managing director of the Church Auditing Department, read the auditing report and Brother F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, present

the statistical report of the Church for the year 2002.

We will now be pleased to hear from Elders Joseph B. Wirthlin and Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

The Light of Christ

It is a privilege to be with you today. I love hearing the word of the Lord spoken by our leaders as they are guided by the divine gift of the Holy Ghost. Today I would like to say a few words regarding this wonderful gift.

Have you ever thought about the amount of light and energy generated by our sun? The amount is almost beyond comprehension. Yet the heat and light that we receive come as a free gift from God. This is another proof of the goodness of our Heavenly Father.¹

The light from the sun breaks through space, bathing our planet as it encircles the sun with life-giving warmth and light. Without the sun, there could be no life on this planet; it would be forever barren, cold, and dark.

As the sun gives life and light to the earth, a spiritual light gives nourishment to our spirits. We call this the Light of Christ. The scriptures teach us that it “lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”² Thus, all mankind can enjoy its blessings. The Light of Christ is the divine influence that allows every man, woman, and child to distinguish between good and evil. It encourages all to choose the right, to seek eternal truth, and to learn again the truths that we knew in our premortal existence but have forgotten in mortality.

The Light of Christ should not be confused with the personage of the Holy Ghost, for the Light of Christ is not a personage at all. Its influence is preliminary

to and preparatory to one’s receiving the Holy Ghost. The Light of Christ will lead the honest soul to “[hearken] to the voice”³ to find the true gospel and the true Church and thereby receive the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit, a separate and distinct member of the Godhead.⁴ He is a witness or testifier of the power of God, the divinity of Christ, and the truth of the restored gospel. Many throughout history in all nations have sought diligently to commune with the heavens and gain the light of gospel truth. They have felt the influence of the Holy Ghost confirm the truth of the gospel.

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. Had he not taken this . . . ordinance upon him, the Holy Ghost which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him.”⁵

Blessings of the gift of the Holy Ghost

The gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the right to receive the Holy Ghost as a constant companion, is obtained only on condition of faith in Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the laying on

of hands by authorized servants endowed with the Melchizedek Priesthood. It is a most precious gift available only to worthy members of the Lord's Church.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord calls the gift of the Holy Ghost "the unspeakable gift."⁶ It is the source of testimony and spiritual gifts. It enlightens minds, fills our souls with joy,⁷ teaches us all things, and brings forgotten knowledge to our remembrance.⁸ The Holy Ghost also "will show unto [us] all things what [we] should do."⁹

President James E. Faust added that the gift "of the Holy Ghost is the greatest guarantor of inward peace in our unstable world."¹⁰

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, "How great a blessing it is to have the ministering influence of a member of the Godhead."¹¹ Think of what this means—the ability and the right to receive the ministrations of a member of the Godhead, to commune with infinite wisdom, infinite knowledge, and infinite power!

Earn the Holy Ghost's companionship

As with all gifts, this gift must be received and accepted to be enjoyed. When priesthood hands were laid upon your head to confirm you a member of the Church, you heard the words, "Receive the Holy Ghost." This did not mean that the Holy Ghost unconditionally became your constant companion. Scriptures warn us that the Spirit of the Lord will "not always strive with man."¹² When we are confirmed, we are given the *right* to the companionship of the Holy Ghost, but it is a right that we must continue to earn through obedience and worthiness. We cannot take this gift for granted.

The Holy Ghost will warn us of danger, and it will inspire us to help others in need. President Thomas S. Monson counseled us: "We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey. Promptings of the Spirit are not to be postponed."¹³

The Holy Ghost penetrates darkness

I once had the opportunity to tour a large cave. While there, the guide turned off the lights for a moment to demonstrate what it was like to be in total darkness. It was an amazing experience. I put my hand an inch from my eyes and could not see it. It was frightening in a way. I was relieved when the lights were turned back on.

As light penetrates the darkness and makes physical things visible, so does the Holy Ghost penetrate the spiritual darkness that surrounds us and make plainly visible spiritual things that once were hidden. The Apostle Paul taught that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."¹⁴

Enjoy the full blessings of the gift

I fear that some members of the Lord's Church "live far beneath our privileges" with regard to the gift of the Holy Ghost.¹⁵ Some are distracted by the things of the world that block out the influence of the Holy Ghost, preventing them from recognizing spiritual promptings. This is a noisy and busy world that we live in. Remember that being busy is not necessarily being spiritual. If we are not careful, the things of this world can crowd out the things of the Spirit.

Some are spiritually deadened and past feeling because of their choices to commit sin. Others simply hover in spiritual complacency with no desire to rise above themselves and commune with the Infinite. If they would open their hearts to the refining influence of this unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, a glorious new spiritual dimension would come to light. Their eyes would gaze upon a vista scarcely imaginable. They could know for themselves things of the Spirit that are choice, precious, and capable of enlarging the soul, expanding the mind, and filling the heart with inexpressible joy.

President Brigham Young spoke of a sacred experience when the martyred Prophet Joseph Smith came in vision to him, bringing the Saints one more message. It is a message that Saints need today more than ever before:

“[Be sure to] tell the people to . . . keep the spirit of the Lord,” Joseph said, “and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach you what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it.”¹⁶

Assessing whether we have the Spirit

Brothers and sisters, do we turn away the still, small voice? Do we do things that offend the Holy Ghost? Do we allow influences into our homes that drive the Spirit from our homes? The type of entertainment that we permit into our homes will certainly have an impact on the power of the Holy Ghost. Much of the entertainment of the world is offensive to the Holy Ghost. Surely we should not watch movies or television shows that are filled with violence, vulgar language, and immorality.

I invite you to ponder individually in a humble and prayerful manner and ask yourself, “Do I have the Spirit in my life? Am I happy? Am I doing anything in my life that is offensive to the Spirit and preventing the Holy Ghost from being my constant companion?” Have the courage to repent, if needed, and again enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

We need the Holy Ghost in our homes

Do we enjoy the influence of the Holy Ghost in our homes? Are we doing anything as a family that is offensive to the Spirit? Can we more effectively invite the Holy Ghost into our homes?

Our homes need to be more Christ-centered. We should spend more time at the temple and less time in the pursuit of pleasure. We should lower the noise level in our homes so that the noise of the world will not overpower the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost. One of our greatest goals as parents should be to enjoy the power and influence of the Holy Ghost in our homes. We should pray and study the scriptures. We could sing the hymns of the Restoration to invite the Holy Ghost into our homes. Regular family home evening will also help.

In these perilous times, we need this unspeakable gift in our lives. President Boyd K. Packer reminds us: “We need not live in fear of the future. We have every reason to rejoice and little reason to fear. If we follow the promptings of the Spirit, we will be safe, whatever the future holds. We will be shown what to do.”¹⁷

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the Saints could distinguish the gift of the Holy Ghost from all other spirits, for “it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness and build up the kingdom of God.”¹⁸

An outpouring that fills the soul with joy

A friend of mine once told me about his experience in coming to know and understand the gift of the Holy Ghost. He had prayed often and longed to know the truth of the gospel.

Although he felt at peace with his beliefs, he had never received the certain knowledge for which he hungered. He had reconciled himself to the fact that he might be one of those who would have to walk through this life relying upon the faith of others.

One morning, while pondering the scriptures, he felt something surge through his body from the top of his head to the

bottom of his feet. “I was immersed in a feeling of such intense love and pure joy,” he explained. “I cannot describe the measure of what I felt at that time other than to say I was enveloped in joy so profound there was no room in me for any other sensation.”

Even as he felt this outpouring of the Holy Ghost, he wondered if possibly he was just imagining what was happening. “The more I wondered,” he said, “the more intense the feelings became until it was all I could do to tearfully say, ‘It is enough.’”

As a boy, my father had a similar experience the day he was baptized. He related that when the bishop laid his hands upon his head and said, “Receive the Holy Ghost,” “I had a peculiar feeling, . . . something that I had never experienced before. . . . [It was] a feeling of happiness, a feeling that filled my soul.”

From that moment on and throughout his life, he always knew that Jesus Christ lived and directed His Church through a living prophet.¹⁹

Receive this unspeakable gift

There are many today who have felt promptings from the Holy Ghost as they study the Book of Mormon or listen to the testimonies of missionaries and friends. Unto these I say, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel in its fulness is restored to the earth once again! Joseph Smith was a true prophet who translated the Book of Mormon through the gift and power of God. I urge all to read the Book of Mormon and apply its promise:

“When ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”²⁰

To you who are not members of the Church, I urge you with all the tenderness of my heart—do not resist the truth any longer. Give place in your hearts to this heavenly light. Have faith, repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you too shall receive this unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.

Our Heavenly Father lives! Jesus is the Christ! Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fulness. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the prophet, seer, and revelator in our day. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Experts at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) estimate that “the total energy radiated [by the sun] is 383 billion trillion kilowatts, which is equivalent to the energy generated by 100 billion tons of TNT exploding each second” (NASA Office of Space Science, “Solar System Exploration,” Internet, www.solarsystem.nasa.gov/features/planets/sun/sun.html).
2. John 1:9; see also Moroni 7:16; Doctrine and Covenants 84:46.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 84:46.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:555.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 121:26.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 11:13.
8. See John 14:26.
9. 2 Nephi 32:5.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 41; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 32.
11. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 259.
12. Genesis 6:3; see also 2 Nephi 26:11; Doctrine and Covenants 1:33; Moses 8:17.
13. *Live the Good Life* (1988), 59.
14. 1 Corinthians 2:14.
15. See Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 32.
16. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1846–1847*, comp. Elden J. Watson (1971), 529.

17. In Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 8; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 8.
18. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 529.
19. Joseph L. Wirthlin, in Conference Report, Apr. 1956, 12.
20. Moroni 10:4.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

Sharing the gospel on market day

All of us who are under the baptismal covenant have promised to offer the gospel to others.¹ Sometimes, fear of rejection or of giving offense looms before us like an impassable obstacle. Yet some members clear that barrier with ease. I have observed them carefully in my travels. I can picture some of them now.

Saturday is a market day across the world. In the countryside of Ghana, in Ecuador, and in the Philippine Islands, countless people bring the produce of their farms and their handicrafts to a town to sell. They talk with those they meet on the road. And they visit with those near them as they wait for someone to buy. Much of the talk is about the struggles of existence, of breaking out of poverty, and sometimes about danger.

Among those on the roads and in the markets are Latter-day Saints. Much of their talk with those they meet would be the same as you would hear anywhere in the world. “Where are you from?” “Is that your son with you?” “How many children do you have?” But there will be a difference in the Latter-day Saints. It would be noticeable in their eyes as much as in their words. They listen carefully with the look of someone who cares about the answers to questions and who cares about the person.

If the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, it would turn to things that matter deeply to both of them. They would talk of what they believe brings happiness and what brings sadness. And the talk

would turn to hopes for this life and the next. The Latter-day Saint would express quiet assurance. Not every time, but sometimes, the Latter-day Saint would be asked, “Why are you so much at peace? How do you know these things you say you know?”

And then there would come a quiet answer. Perhaps it would be about Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appearing to the young boy Joseph Smith. It might be about the resurrected Savior’s loving ministry, as described in the Book of Mormon, to common people who had faith in Him and who loved Him as we do.

How can I do better at sharing my faith?

If you could hear such a conversation, which reaches spiritual things in a marketplace or on a street, you might ask, “How could I do that? How could I become better at sharing my faith with those who do not yet feel what I feel?” It is a question for all of us who are members. That same question is on the mind of every bishop and branch president in the Church, who now have the charge to lead missionary work among his people. The answer to that question is at the heart of the harvest which will come.

I’ve studied carefully and prayerfully some who are remarkably faithful and effective witnesses of the Savior and His Church. Their stories are inspiring. One humble man was called as the president of a tiny branch. There were so few members he could not see how the branch could function. He walked into a grove of trees to pray. He asked God what he should do.

An answer came. He and the few members began inviting friends to join with them. In a year, hundreds had come into the waters of baptism and become fellow citizens in the Lord's Church.

I know a man who travels almost every week in his work. On any day there are missionaries somewhere in the world teaching someone he met. There is another man who seems undeterred by how many he must speak to before any of them wish to be taught by the missionaries. He doesn't count the cost in his effort but only the happiness of those whose lives are changed.

There is no single pattern in what they do. There is no common technique. Some always carry a Book of Mormon to give away. Others set a date to find someone for the missionaries to teach. Another has found questions which draw out feelings about what matters most in life to a person. Each has prayed to know what to do. They each seem to get a different answer, suited especially to them and to the people they meet.

Characteristics of those who share the gospel

But in one way they are all alike. It is this: they have a common way of seeing who they are. They can do what they have been inspired to do because of who they are. To do what we are to do, we will have to become like them in at least two ways. First, they feel that they are the beloved children of a loving Heavenly Father. Because of that, they turn to Him easily and often in prayer. They expect to receive His personal direction. They obey in meekness and humility, like the children of a perfect parent. He is close to them.

Second, they are the grateful disciples of the resurrected Jesus Christ. They know for themselves that the Atonement is real and necessary for all. They have felt cleansed through baptism by those in authority and the receipt of the Holy Ghost

for themselves. And because of the peace they have experienced, they are like the sons of Mosiah, "desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble."²

Those who speak easily and often of the restored gospel prize what it has meant to them. They think of that great blessing often. It is the memory of the gift they have received which makes them eager for others to receive it. They have felt the love of the Savior. For them these words are their daily, hourly reality:

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

"We love him, because he first loved us."³

Pray for the gift of perfect love

Even having felt that love, the true disciple sometimes feels anxiety. The Apostle John was clear about that: fear will be gone when we are made *perfect* in love. We can pray for that gift of perfect love. We can pray with confidence that we can feel the Savior's love for us and for all we meet. He loved us and them enough to pay the price of all our sins. It is one thing to believe that. It is something far more to have our hearts changed to feel it every moment. The command to pray to feel the Savior's love is also a promise. Listen:

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

"But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure."⁴

A man is prepared to share the gospel

The Lord trusts His true disciples. He sends prepared people to His prepared servants. You have had the experience, as have I, of meeting people where you were sure the meeting could not have been by chance.

I have a friend who prays every day to meet someone who is prepared to receive the gospel. He carries with him a copy of the Book of Mormon. The night before a short trip recently, he decided not to take a copy with him but instead to carry what is called a pass-along card. But in the morning a spiritual impression came: "Take a Book of Mormon with you." He put one in his bag.

A woman he knew sat next to him on the plane, and he wondered, "Is this the one?" She rode with him again on the return trip. Now he thought, "How should I bring the gospel up?"

Instead, she said to him, "You pay tithing to your church, don't you?" He said that he did. She said she was supposed to pay tithing to her church but she didn't. And then she said, "What is this about the Book of Mormon?" He explained that the book is scripture, another witness of Jesus Christ, translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith. She seemed interested, so he reached down into his bag and said, "I was impressed to bring this book with me. I think it is for you."

She began to read it. As they parted, she said, "You and I are going to have to

have more conversations about this." What my friend could not know—but God did—was that she was looking for a church. God knew she had watched my friend and wondered what about his church made him so happy. God knew she would ask about the Book of Mormon, and He knew she would be willing to be taught by the missionaries. She was prepared. So was my friend. And so can you and I be.

Our life and words should bear testimony

Your worthiness and your desire will shine in your face and your eyes. You will be excited about the Lord's Church and His work, and it will show. You will be His disciple 24 hours a day in every situation. You won't need to build up your courage for one great moment to speak to someone and then retreat. The fact that most people are not interested in the restored gospel will have little bearing on what you do and say. Speaking what you believe will be part of what you are.

My father was like that. He was a scientist. He lectured to audiences in countries around the world. Once I read a talk he had given to a large scientific convention. In it he referred to creation and a Creator as he talked about his science. I knew that few, if any, in that audience would have shared his faith. So I said to him with wonder and admiration, "Dad, you bore your testimony." He looked at me with surprise on his face and said, "Did I?"

He had not even known that he was being brave. He simply said what he knew was true. When he bore testimony, even those who rejected it knew it came not by design but because it was part of him. He was what he was, wherever he was.

That is the mark of every person who is bold and effective in sharing the gospel. They see themselves as children of a loving, living Father in Heaven. And they see themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ. It

takes no discipline for them to pray. They do it naturally. It is no special effort to remember the Savior. His love for them and theirs for Him is always with them. That is who they are and how they see themselves and see those around them.

The gospel will go to every nation

Now that may seem to us to require a great change, but we can be confident that it will come. The change in individual members is happening across the Church in every nation. This is the great time foreseen by prophets since the Creation. The restored gospel will go to every nation. The Savior sent these words to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“I have sent forth mine angel flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel, who hath appeared unto some and hath committed it unto man, who shall appear unto many that dwell on the earth.

“And this gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”⁵

Whatever tumults occur, we can know that God will set bounds to fulfill His promises. He, not just men, has the ultimate control of nations and of events to allow His purposes to be fulfilled. Among every people and every nation there will be raised up those who serve with absolute assurance that they are children of God and who have become purified disciples of the resurrected Christ in His Church.

Be part of the miracle

A few years ago I spoke to the missionaries in the training center in Japan. I promised them that a great day would dawn in that nation. I said that there would be a great increase in the members speaking eagerly to those they met of their testimony of the restored gospel. My thought then was that the courage to speak would come from an increased admiration for

the Church in that land. I know now that the great miracle, a mighty change, will come inside the members, not in the world around them.

They and members across the earth will love and listen and talk and testify out of changed hearts. Bishops and branch presidents will lead them by example. The harvest of souls will be great, and it will be safe in the Lord’s hands.⁶

To be part of that miracle, you must not wait until you feel closer to Heavenly Father or until you are sure that you have been purified through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Pray for the chance to encounter people who sense there could be something better in their lives. Pray to know what you should do to help them. Your prayers will be answered. You will meet people prepared by the Lord. You will find yourself feeling and saying things beyond your past experience. And then in time you will feel yourself drawing closer to your Heavenly Father, and you will feel the cleansing and the forgiveness the Savior promises His faithful witnesses. And you will feel His approval, knowing you have done what He asked of you, because He loves you and trusts you.

I am grateful to live in such a time. I am grateful to know that you and I are loved children of a glorified Heavenly Father. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, that He is my Savior and yours and the Savior of all the people you will ever meet. The Father and the Son came to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The keys of the priesthood were restored, and the last, great gathering has begun. I know that is true.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 88:81; *Mosiah* 18:9.
2. *Mosiah* 28:3.
3. *1 John* 4:18–19.
4. *Moroni* 7:46–48.
5. *Doctrine and Covenants* 133:36–37.
6. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 50:41–42.

President Monson

Thank you, brethren. The choir and congregation will now sing “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elders Craig C. Christensen and James M. Dunn of the Seventy

will address us. They will be followed by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
“Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

Elder Craig C. Christensen

Seek, and ye shall find

My dear brothers and sisters, I pray that I may be guided by the Spirit of the Lord as I share with you my personal feelings and testimony.

One of the most compelling invitations and profound promises given by the Savior is found in the simple phrase “seek, and ye shall find.”¹

Although the process of seeking includes prayer and supplication, it goes much deeper than that. Seeking is more of a journey than a single event. I liken it to taking a long, cross-country vacation. Although we know what our ultimate destination is, the rich experiences and real learning come day by day as we progress toward our goal.

The pattern for seeking answers from God

As we seek the things of God, we must humble ourselves before Him, remembering that it is by His grace that we receive them, and focus our thoughts and our prayers, our faith and our desires, even all of the energy of our hearts that we might receive light and understanding directly from a loving Heavenly Father.

The pattern for seeking answers from God is simple to explain yet much more personal when applied. To begin, we are invited to study in our minds and ponder in our hearts those things that we most desire of Him.² This process of reflection brings clarity and inspiration to our souls. We are then instructed to present our thoughts

and desires directly to Heavenly Father in humble prayer with the promise that, if we ask Him, in the name of Christ, if what we are seeking is right, and if we “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto [us], by the power of the Holy Ghost,” for it is “by the power of the Holy Ghost” that we “know the truth of all things.”³

Seek the best gifts and shun evil

And what should we seek?

The scriptures teach us that we should “seek . . . earnestly the [very] best gifts”⁴ and that we should seek wisdom and understanding and “prepare every needful thing.”⁵ We are admonished to lose ourselves in the service of others⁶ and to seek those things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy.”⁷

At the same time, we are cautioned not to seek the unclean things of the world.⁸ President Gordon B. Hinckley has said: “There is so much evil, enticing evil, in the world. Shun it, my brothers and sisters. Avoid it. It is as a dangerous disease. It is as a poison that will destroy you. Stay away from it.”⁹ In the book of Amos we read, “Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you.”¹⁰

Seek to know God and Jesus Christ

What we seek first and foremost, above all other things, is “the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.”¹¹ We seek

to know “the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [He has] sent.”¹²

In a very personal version of the invitation to seek and find, the Savior said, “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me.”¹³

And what does it mean to find Him?

As we engage our faith and commit our energy to draw closer to Jesus Christ, we begin to understand more fully who He really is. As we seek Him diligently, we gain a deep and abiding testimony of His matchless love, His perfect life and example, and the blessings of His great atoning sacrifice. As we draw nearer to Him, we truly begin to find Him and to recognize Him as the Creator of the earth, the Redeemer of mankind, the Only Begotten of the Father, the King of kings, the Prince of Peace.

The deeper we seek, the more we begin to appreciate His role as the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Holy Messiah of the New Testament. We begin to understand more fully His eternal message of salvation and exaltation. We find that He continues to beckon us to come and follow Him, that His teachings are certain and are as applicable today as they were throughout all previous generations of time. We begin to know, with more profound appreciation, what occurred in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Although He was erroneously convicted and sentenced, He gave His life willingly; and in fulfillment of His own prophetic words He was resurrected on the third day. This priceless gift brings immortality to all and eternal life to the obedient and faithful.

As we begin to realize that His message was and is for all mankind everywhere, we accept, with great enthusiasm, the scriptural account of His visit to the ancient inhabitants of the American continent. We delight in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as a second witness—indeed another testament—of His messianic

mission as the Savior and the Redeemer of the world. We acknowledge that a man can get closer to Him by searching and praying about the Book of Mormon than by studying any other book.¹⁴

Blessings that come from seeking Him

As we seek to find Him, we receive a witness of His personal visit, together with His Father, to the boy prophet, Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-awaited “dispensation of the fulness of times.”¹⁵

As we seek Him, we recognize that He has restored His Church to the earth, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and that within His Church He has bestowed the power and authority to provide essential ordinances that will permit us to return and live with Him once again.

As we seek Him, we find that He continues to guide His Church through His living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, and that the organization of His Church is built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, “Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”¹⁶

As we seek Him diligently, we feel His love for us and understand more clearly the answers to our prayers. We acknowledge that through His Spirit we “find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures”¹⁷ and gain a greater desire to live our lives in accordance with His commandments and direction.

As we seek Him, we find that He is “the light and the life of the world.”¹⁸ As we seek Him, brothers and sisters, we shall indeed find Him and experience the inner peace He has promised us. I so testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 7:7; 3 Nephi 14:7.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–8; Moroni 10:3.
3. Moroni 10:4–5.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 46:8.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 109:7–8.

6. See Luke 17:33.
7. Articles of Faith 1:13.
8. See 3 Nephi 20:41; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38.
9. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 709.
10. Amos 5:14.
11. Matthew 6:33.
12. John 17:3.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 88:63.
14. See Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 194.
15. Ephesians 1:10.
16. Ephesians 2:20.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 89:19.
18. Mosiah 16:9.

Elder James M. Dunn

Words to live by

The world is full of words. Many are shrill and accusatory, and many are sarcastic. Together they are a noise, a blur, and we do not listen to or seriously consider them. Then, once in a while, through the din as it were, we hear precious words, such as in this conference, words to live by.

President Thomas S. Monson, in the April 1988 general conference, stated:

“We treasure the inspired thought:
“‘God is a Father.
Man is a brother.
Life is a mission
And not a career.’”

(Quoting Stephen L. Richards, in Conference Report, Apr. 1988, 62; or *Ensign*, May 1988, 54.)

These are words to live by.

We are all children of God

God is our Heavenly Father. We are His spiritually begotten children. Knowing our relationship to God helps us better understand where we came from and what our eternal possibilities are. Knowing Him, we learn better how to approach Him and how we ought to live in order to please Him. Our earthly sojourn is part of a divine plan of happiness designed by Him, which beckons us to live by faith, to gain mortal experiences, and to become qualified through obedience and the power of the Atonement to return to His presence forever.

We live in a world marked by great diversity: different lands, cultures, races, and languages. To some degree, at least, one must believe that this is the way God intended it to be. The gospel teaches us that, notwithstanding these differences, we are all children of the same Heavenly Father. The human race is one family, and we are all, therefore, brothers and sisters.

As siblings we must see that Heavenly Father loves His children equally, as any good earthly father would. Courtesy, kindness, generosity, and forgiveness are all elements of proper conduct among family members. Imagine the disappointment of a perfect, loving Father who sees His children treating each other badly.

Keep focused on life’s true purposes

Life is short. “It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). In the precious time that we have in mortality, there are many things to be done. Some of these things are more important than others, and we must make wise decisions. Some things are obviously wrong. Some are good. But some are vital if we are to meet the expectations of our Father and succeed in our mortal probation.

The expectations of the Father exceed merely devising a way to make a living or indulging ourselves in the beauties and pleasures of this earth, even though the Lord has assured us, “It pleaseth God that

he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess" (D&C 59:20).

Successfully working our way through life, while keeping our eye on life's true purposes, blesses us both here and hereafter. Obeying the commandments, keeping sacred covenants, and being "anxiously engaged in a good cause" (D&C 58:27) enable us to partake of the joy that is the purpose of our earthly existence (see 2 Nephi 2:25).

The Lord has given us this additional assurance: "But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23).

So our earthly mission hasn't much to do at all with our mortal careers. It has, however, everything to do with preparing for our immortal destiny.

I testify that the godly life will lead us back to the Father, who gave us life here and who will receive us back into eternal life.

Distractions of the world

Many of God's children live life as though there were no tomorrow, no day of reckoning. They fill their lives with the pursuit of comfort, gain, and pleasure. Of such, Nephi said, "Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us" (2 Nephi 28:7). Many compound this miscalculation by concluding:

"Nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 28:8).

As the result of such erroneous thinking, the world is filled with lurid and lascivious attractions. We see young men who refuse to marry; young women who foolishly surrender their virtue in pursuit of lustful relationships; couples who purposefully refuse to have children or who opt for a "trophy child" because a family would interfere with plans for adventure, leisure, or maximum financial gain.

Living by God's words keeps us on track

Nevertheless, there are millions of faithful brothers and sisters throughout the world who strive daily to "live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God" (D&C 84:44). They plan and live their lives in compliance with the revealed word of Heavenly Father. They work hard, study hard, and pray hard. They know how to be serious, and they know how to have fun. They listen to the word, and they obey the word. They know the meaning of and the blessings that come from living the law of sacrifice. These faithful people help and defer to others. They love and care for little children and the elderly. Good manners and high morals are their hallmarks, and they lead by example in their homes, neighborhoods, and communities. God loves and blesses them. His words are the words they live by, words that "are sure and shall not fail" (D&C 64:31).

Words to live by. They are usually simple and to the point. They help us remember. They keep us on track. They will lead us back to our Heavenly Father and His rest.

May we remember:

"God is a Father.
Man is a brother.
Life is a mission
And not a career."

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

The Savior's charge to feed His sheep

Brothers and sisters, Easter is a time when the Christian world focuses on and rejoices in the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That one moment in time changed everything forever. The Savior broke down every barrier that stood in the way of our return to a loving Heavenly Father. In return He asks that we “go . . . and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19–20).

A more intimate version of the same message is recorded in the Gospel of John. On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asked Peter three times, “Loest thou me?” Each time Peter’s reply was the same: “Thou knowest that I love thee.” And each time the Savior instructed Peter: “Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep. . . . Feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17).

The Savior’s impassioned charge to “feed [His] sheep” continues in force today. Like Peter and his brethren of old, the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ today have the charge to take the gospel to all the world. This charge is seldom far from our minds. Every General Authority has the responsibility to be a missionary.

But the Savior was not just talking to the Apostles. He was also talking to every person who has been blessed to hear the gospel and is a member of His Church. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord put it in very simple terms: “It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor” (D&C 88:81).

Raising the standard for missionaries

During the last general conference we challenged our young men to better

prepare themselves to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We asked them to be worthy, qualified, spiritually energized missionaries. With the unsettled conditions that exist in the world today, they need to be “the greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 50; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 47). We don’t expect them to be perfect, but they need to be anxious, willing, and committed to serve so they can reach new levels of spirituality as gospel teachers. They need to know the message of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it with power in their own words under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Church we are working hard to help all of our missionaries to increase their spiritual maturity. This worldwide effort has been referred to as “raising the bar” or “raising the standard.” We thank you parents, bishops, and stake presidents for your support in this effort. We also thank the faithful youth of the Church for your willingness to live up to the Lord’s standard. May our Heavenly Father continue to bless you as you prepare to serve Him in this troubled world.

Raising the standard for all members

But as we raise the level of expectation for the performance of our missionaries, we must also raise the level of expectation for the performance of all of the members of the Church in fulfilling our missionary duties. We need your help, brothers and sisters, to support and assist our missionaries in finding and baptizing many more of our Heavenly Father’s children. We need you to watch over, protect, and inspire the missionaries, who are servants of the Lord. If the standard is to be raised, it is raised for all of us. We must be more faithful. We must be more spiritually in tune. We must prepare ourselves to assist

the missionaries in finding those of our Heavenly Father's children who will embrace the message of the Restoration.

Remember, brothers and sisters, we're not marketing a product. We're not selling anything. We're not trying to impress anyone with our numbers or our growth. We are members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, empowered and sent forth by the Lord Himself to find, nourish, and bring safely into His Church those who are seeking to know the truth.

Viewed from that eternal perspective, what we are to do seems so simple and clear, but I know that member missionary work can be challenging and sometimes frightening. Please allow me to suggest three simple things that we can do to assist in this divinely commissioned responsibility.

Pray for opportunities to share the gospel

First, we should exercise our faith and pray individually and as families, asking for help in finding ways to share the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Ask the Lord to open the way. Prayerfully set a date with your family to have someone in your home for the missionaries to teach.

Remember, brothers and sisters, this is the Lord's Church. Let Him guide you through constant prayer. With a prayer in your heart, talk to everyone you can. Don't prejudge. Don't withhold the good news from anyone. Talk to everyone, and trust in the promised power of the Spirit to give you the words you should say. Let them make the decision to accept or reject your invitation. Over time, the Lord will put into your path those who are seeking the truth. He is the Good Shepherd. He knows His sheep, and they will know His voice, spoken through you, and they will follow Him (see John 10).

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "It will be a great day when our people not only pray for the missionaries throughout the world, but ask the Lord to help them

to assist the missionaries who are laboring in their own ward" ("Missionary Service," *First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 2003, 19).

Lead by example

Second, leaders must lead by example. The Spirit will prompt and guide you in finding those interested in our message. Your personal worthiness will give you the courage and the spiritual power to inspire your members to actively help the missionaries.

Leadership of a branch president in Maine

Some years ago a faithful convert, Brother George McLaughlin, was called to preside over a small branch of 20 members in Farmingdale, Maine. He was a humble man who drove a milk delivery truck for a living. Through his fasting and earnest prayer, the Spirit taught him what he and the members of his branch needed to do to help the Church grow in their area. Through his great faith, constant prayer, and powerful example, he taught his members how to share the gospel. It's a marvelous story—one of the great missionary stories of this dispensation. In just one year there were 450 convert baptisms in the branch. The next year there were an additional 200 converts. President McLaughlin indicated, "My job as branch president was to teach [the new converts] how to be Mormons. I had to teach them how to give talks and lessons in church. I had to teach them how to teach the gospel to their children. I trained the new members to become strong members." Pretty simple.

Just five years later the Augusta Maine Stake was organized. Much of the leadership of that new stake came from those converts in the Farmingdale Branch. Now we might ask why there was such great success in those days, and the answer may be because of the urgent need to strengthen the Church. Let me assure you that that

same urgency in all units of the Church is every bit as critical today as it was then.

Missionary work is centered in the ward

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have made it clear that missionary work is to be centered in the ward. Stake presidents and bishops have the responsibility and accountability to help members find the pure in heart and prepare them for baptism and for a life of service within their wards and stakes. President Hinckley has also said, "I would like to suggest that every bishop in the Church give as a motto to his people, 'Let's all work to grow the ward'" ("Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 106).

Use of a ward council in Washington

One bishop in the state of Washington has prayerfully followed that counsel. This is what he is doing. Through priesthood and auxiliary leaders, the ward council coordinates missionary work in the ward. Missionaries are invited to ward council meetings to discuss their work. Members are assigned to attend investigator visits with the missionaries. Members and missionaries also visit less-active and part-member families together. Last year this ward baptized and confirmed 46 new members, and retention of those members is very high. Those who come into the Church or who return to activity in this ward already have friends because the priesthood and auxiliaries are involved in the conversion process by direction of the bishop through the ward council (see "Ward Council Is Secret of Centralia Ward Success," *Church News*, 1 Feb. 2003, 5).

Engage the whole ward in missionary work

Bishops, engage the whole ward in proclaiming the gospel. You will see that

the Lord will bless you and your members with many more converts and many more who will return to full activity. Missionary work should not only be on the ward council agendas but also on elders quorum; Relief Society; and other quorum, group, and auxiliary agendas. Emphasis should be placed on baptizing and retaining in activity fathers and mothers along with their children. Thus the missionary work of priesthood and auxiliary leaders should be coordinated by the ward mission leader and the bishop through the ward council. As we do so, converts will be fully active members in their wards.

Right now, members have a special opportunity to share the gospel by using the *Finding Faith in Christ* DVD that was enclosed with your April 2003 *Ensign* magazine. Invite your neighbors and friends to spend an evening with you during the Easter season, sharing together the life, ministry, and glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It may also be appropriate to have the missionaries attend with you and teach how the Lord has restored His Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Missionary work requires faith and love

Third, member missionary work does not require the development of strategies or gimmicks. It does require faith—real faith and trust in the Lord. It also requires genuine love. The first great commandment is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.... The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37, 39).

So let the power of love guide us in sharing the gospel with family members, friends, neighbors, business associates, and any other people we encounter as we go through life. Most everyone wants to enjoy peace and happiness. That is a natu-

real human desire. People want to find answers to the problems they face. This is increasingly true in the world we now live in.

Professional advancement, increased income, bigger homes, or newer cars and recreational equipment do not bring lasting peace and happiness. Happiness comes from understanding God and knowing that He has a plan for our eternal joy and peace. Happiness comes from knowing and loving the Savior and living our lives in accordance with His teachings. Happiness comes from strong family and Church relationships based on gospel values.

Some members say, "I'm afraid to share the gospel because I might offend someone." Experience has shown that people are not offended when the sharing is motivated by the spirit of love and concern. How could anyone be offended when we say something like this: "I love the way my church helps me" and then add whatever the Spirit directs. It's when we appear only to be fulfilling an assignment and we fail to express real interest and love that we offend others.

Don't ever forget, brothers and sisters, that you and I have in our possession the very points of doctrine that will bring people to the Lord. The restored gospel of Jesus Christ has within it the power to bring deep and abiding happiness to the human soul—something that will be valued and cherished for the rest of time and for all eternity. We are not just trying to get people to join our Church; we are sharing with them the fulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. But as powerful as our message is, it cannot be imposed or forced on people. It can be shared—heart to heart, soul to soul, spirit to spirit—only by being good neighbors and by caring and showing love. We need to be watchful for one another and reach out to one another. And as we do so, we will radiate the gospel in our

own lives, and it will radiate to the people the blessings the gospel has to offer.

Let us follow the admonition of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "After all that has been said, [our] greatest and most important duty is to preach the Gospel" (*History of the Church*, 2:478).

We can and we must do better, brothers and sisters. I pray that the Lord will grant to each of us the faith and courage to increase our participation in supporting our full-time missionaries in sharing the restored gospel with all of God's children throughout the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Ballard.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will convene in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 P.M. mountain standard time.

We call your attention to the need to move your clocks ahead one hour before retiring tonight because of the change to daylight time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

As you leave the conference, we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

We express gratitude to the combined choir from Brigham Young University for the beautiful music they provided this afternoon.

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Duane B. Gerrard of the Seventy.

Elder L. Tom Perry

The importance of the family

In a world of turmoil and uncertainty, it is more important than ever to make our families the center of our lives and the top of our priorities. Families lie at the center of our Heavenly Father's plan. This statement from "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" declares the responsibilities of parents to their families:

"Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. 'Children are an heritage of the Lord' (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations."¹

In recent meetings with the First Presidency, they have expressed concern about the deterioration of the family. Their mandate to the Priesthood Executive Council was to concentrate on the family in our assignments.

In response to the First Presidency's concern, many plans and efforts are already in place. We will use all of the resources we have to encourage greater harmony, greater love, and greater influence in the Lord's special designated unit—the family.

Make the home a place of refuge

We need to make our homes a place of refuge from the storm, which is increasing in intensity all about us. Even if the smallest openings are left unattended, negative influences can penetrate the very walls of our homes. Let me cite an example.

Several years ago I was having dinner with my daughter and her family. The

scene is all too common in most homes with small children. My daughter was trying to encourage her young, three-year-old son to eat a balanced meal. He had eaten all the food on his plate that he liked. A small serving of green beans remained, which he was not fond of. In desperation, the mother picked up a fork and tried to encourage him to eat his beans. He tolerated it just about as long as he could. Then he exclaimed, "Look, Mom, don't foul up a good friendship!"

Those were the exact words he heard on a television commercial a few days earlier. Oh, what impact advertising, television programs, the Internet, and the other media are having on our family units!

Church media resources to help families

We remind you that parents are to preside over their own families.

Helps and reminders will come from the Church Internet site and television channels, as well as through priesthood and auxiliary leadership, to assist you as we strive to fulfill our family responsibilities.

Family-oriented television programs

In some of the zones of the world, we have an alternative to commercial television networks and some of their antifamily programming. We have BYU Television, which presents family-oriented programs. In addition to programs that bring gospel teaching, there are programs directed to parent instruction and family entertainment. We will also be striving to increase the quality and frequency of our family-centered Home Front public service spots.

The Church's Web site

We have other helps covering a wider area than the television network. One such help is the Church Web site, lds.org. It has

recently been updated to include a new home and family page. The page includes thoughts from the scriptures and Church leaders to strengthen the family. It also includes ideas for family activities. A new home and family section provides:

- Teachings from Church leaders specifically for the family.
- Ideas for family activities.
- Family home evening quick tips to help you have meaningful and enjoyable family home evenings.
- Featured articles on topics such as making family home evenings more successful, strengthening the relationship between husband and wife, and ideas for feeling closer as family members.

As the site is updated, additional ideas for planning family home evenings will appear. One of these will offer suggestions for activities for Faith in God, Duty to God, and Personal Progress programs.

Church magazines and Church News

We do have one media source that reaches the entire Church—it is our wonderful Church magazines. These magazines come into our homes regularly and are another way of delivering information to help strengthen the family.

Perhaps you noticed in the March *Ensign* and *Liahona*—the international magazine—a message from President Gordon B. Hinckley on family home evenings:

“We have a family home evening program once a week [Monday night] across the Church in which parents sit down with their children. They study the scriptures. They talk about family problems. They plan family activities and things of that kind. I don’t hesitate to say if every family in the world practiced that one thing, you’d see a very great difference in the solidarity of the families of the world’ (interview, *Boston Globe*, 14 Aug. 2000).”²

Following President Hinckley’s encouragement for us to hold family home evenings, the next article in the *Ensign*

was entitled “The Calling I Didn’t Know I Had”:

“Family home evening was challenging when our children were young. My husband and I took seriously the latter-day prophets’ counsel to hold regular family home evenings, but between our Church callings and other responsibilities, we too often found there wasn’t time or energy to plan an effective, loving family home evening when Monday night came around.

“While visiting Primary one Sunday I noticed how captivated the children were by the stories, visual aids, and brief but effective activities planned for sharing time and music time. I was also absorbed in learning from the well-prepared efforts the Primary counselor and music leader put into their callings. ‘They obviously spent adequate time mingled with lots of love,’ I thought. ‘They do wonderful things in their callings.’

“Just then a thought came to mind: ‘Family home evening is one of your callings. In fact, it is part of your most important calling—motherhood!’ I reflected on that insight. ‘If I can make the time to magnify my callings as newsletter editor and visiting teacher, I can surely magnify my family home evening calling.’”³

What a wonderful thought she has brought to us to encourage us to be more effective in our planning for this special night set aside for the family.

We can also alert you to the fact that our June issues of the Church magazines will be dedicated to a family theme. In addition, throughout the year there will be issues of the *Liahona*, *Ensign*, *New Era*, and *Friend* containing materials for teaching in the home. There will be wonderful suggestions for family home evenings and ideas for everyday teaching moments. The articles are written so they can easily be adapted for lessons for your family.

Children and youth are shown, through prophetic words and through living examples, the importance of loving and honoring their parents. Parents are taught ways

of building and maintaining close family ties, both in good times and in difficult times. The good spirit in these magazines will help fill your homes with warmth, love, and the strength of the gospel.

The *Church News* is also helping to spread the message of the family. It has articles on strengthening love and respect in the home, putting the gospel in action, and planning wholesome recreation.

We hope that by flooding the Church with family-oriented media, members of the Church will be assisted and encouraged to build stronger and better families. We hope it will cause a conscious and sustained effort in building an eternal family unit. An abundance of Church materials will be available for you from which to pick and choose useful ideas. At least by seeing family issues mentioned so often, we all will be reminded to focus our attention on the most important organization the Lord has established here on earth.

Adam and Eve learn importance of family

From the very beginning the Lord has established the importance of the family organization for us. Soon after Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, the Lord spoke to them:

"The Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, [and] beareth record of the Father and the Son. . . ."

"[Then] in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God."

"And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: [If it were] not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient."

"And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters."⁴

"President Brigham Young explained that our families are not yet ours. The Lord has committed them to us to see how we will treat them. Only if we are faithful will they be given to us forever. What we do on earth determines whether or not we will be worthy to become heavenly parents."⁵

The Sabbath is a special time for families

The Church has established two special times for families to be together. The first is centered around the proper observance of the Sabbath day. This is the time we are to attend our regular meetings together, study the life and teachings of the Savior and of the prophets. "Other appropriate Sunday activities include (1) writing personal and family journals, (2) holding family councils, (3) establishing and maintaining family organizations for the immediate and extended family, (4) personal interviews between parents and children, (5) writing to relatives and missionaries, (6) genealogy, (7) visiting relatives and those who are ill or lonely, (8) missionary work, (9) reading stories to children, and (10) singing Church hymns."⁶

Importance of family home evening

The second time is Monday night. We are to teach our children in a well-organized, regular family home evening. No other activities should involve our family members on Monday night. This *designated* time is to be with our families.

We hope all of you have noticed the special emphasis the First Presidency has put on family home evenings. The First Presidency letter of October 4, 1999, was recently repeated in the magazines:

"To: Members of the Church throughout the World

"Dear Brothers and Sisters:

"Monday nights are reserved throughout the Church for family home evenings. We encourage members to set aside this time to strengthen family ties and teach the gospel in their homes.

"Earlier this year we called on parents to devote their best efforts to the teaching and rearing of their children in gospel principles which will keep them close to the Church. We also counseled parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities.

"We urge members, where possible, to avoid holding receptions or other similar activities on Monday evenings. Where practical, members may also want to encourage community and school leaders to avoid scheduling activities on Monday evenings that require children or parents to be away from their homes.

"Church buildings and facilities should be closed on Monday evenings. No ward or stake activities should be planned, and other interruptions to family home evenings should be avoided."⁷

Build a gospel-centered home

May it be our resolve this year to build a gospel-centered home, a safe harbor from the storms of the adversary. Let us again remember the promises and instructions from the Lord to His children:

"The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth. Light and truth forsake that evil one. . . .

"And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers.

"But I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth."⁸

May this be our year for enjoying the light and truth of the gospel in our homes. May our homes truly become places of refuge from the world is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. "Family Home Evening," *Ensign*, Mar. 2003, 3.
3. Jan Whitley Hansen, "The Calling I Didn't Know I Had," *Ensign*, Mar. 2003, 6.
4. See Moses 5:4–5, 9–12.
5. *Gospel Principles* [manual, 1997], 231.
6. "Suggestions for Individual and Family Sabbath-Day Activities," *Ensign*, Mar. 1980, 76.
7. *Ensign*, Mar. 2003, 4.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 93:36–37, 39–40.

The choir sang "Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide."

Elder Duane B. Gerrard offered the benediction.

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session, the third session of the 173rd Annual General Conference, convened in the Conference Center at 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, April 5, 2003. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by a Melchizedek Priesthood choir from stakes in Bluffdale, Riverton, and Herriman, Utah. Thomas

Waldron directed the choir, and Richard Elliott was the organist.

President Monson opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you, brethren, to the general priesthood session of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Hinckley, who presides at this session, has asked me, Brother Monson, to conduct the exercises.

These services are being relayed by satellite transmission to holders of the priesthood gathered in the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall, the BYU Marriott Center, the Provo Missionary Training Center, and in locations in many countries throughout the entire world.

The singing during this session will be furnished by a Melchizedek Priesthood choir from stakes in Bluffdale, Riverton, and Herriman, Utah, under the direction of Thomas Waldron, with Richard Elliott at the organ.

We shall now begin this priesthood session with the choir singing "Hark, All Ye Nations!" Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Hark, All Ye Nations!"

Elder Lynn G. Robbins offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing that old favorite "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," following which Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our first speaker. He will be followed by Elder Daryl H. Garn of the Seventy and Bishop H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop of the Church.

The choir sang "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel."

Elder David B. Haight

What a tremendous sight to look out at this Conference Center filled to capacity and think of the buildings all over the world filled with the priesthood. Probably this would be the largest gathering of the priesthood in the history of the Church. I would imagine that would be true because we continue to grow every year.

First experience with the priesthood

My first brush with the priesthood was when I was baptized. I was baptized in an irrigation canal in the little town of Oakley, Idaho. I was with my friends on the bank of that irrigation canal. We had on our bib swimming suits, which consisted of bib overalls with the legs cut out so you wouldn't sink and holes cut in the pockets. We had never seen a swimming suit made out of knit or of other fabric. My father came out from the First Ward meetinghouse with his counselors. He was carrying

a chair, and he put the chair on the side of the irrigation ditch. My father said, "David, come on over here; we're going to baptize you."

I dove in the canal and swam over to the other side, shivering. It was in September and a little cold, and young boys get the shivers, you know, when you have only bib overalls on. My father got down into the canal. As I remember, he didn't take his shoes off or change anything but was just in his regular clothes. He showed me how to hold my hands, and then he baptized me. After I came up out of the water, we both crawled up on the bank of the canal. I sat in the chair, and they put their hands on my head and confirmed me a member of the Church. After that I dove in the canal and went over on the other side and joined my friends.

This was my first experience, really, with the priesthood.

The power and authority of God

I would remind you that the priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man. Let me say that again: The priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man. Here in these assemblies tonight, we have those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood, the lesser priesthood, and the Melchizedek Priesthood, the higher priesthood. Isn't it interesting to visualize how the Lord and His Heavenly Father, in setting up the plan of salvation, organized it so that men could be worthy enough and could be honored to hold the priesthood and join in the large army of men necessary to bring about the eternal purposes of our Heavenly Father, to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man—mankind everywhere? What a mighty group that would entail!

Aaronic Priesthood responsibilities

A few years after I had been baptized, becoming better acquainted with some duties in the Church, I was ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood. My father, who had baptized me, had died in the meantime of a heart attack, so the bishop conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon me and ordained me to the office of a deacon. I remember that I had a wonderful feeling about that as he conferred the priesthood upon me, that I now had responsibilities and would be accountable for my actions and would have things to learn to do as I would progress through life. I did have a special feeling that I now was a little different, that I wouldn't be exactly the same as friends who did not hold the priesthood or people that you would meet out in the world. I now had some responsibilities, things we would learn on Sundays in church as we would sit around the old coal stove down in the basement of the meetinghouse.

On Saturdays we would clean out the church, fill the coal buckets with coal, and see that the building was ready for Sunday

meetings. We had things to do in the lesser priesthood, in all the temporal affairs of the ward—collecting fast offerings and doing duties for the bishop. He and other leaders would teach us about the Aaronic Priesthood and the office of a deacon, then a teacher, and then, of course, a priest as we would advance in the priesthood. It seemed to me that I was developing an interesting understanding, a vision of the work to be done, and that I personally had some responsibility, even though I was just a young boy in a little country town. There was something very important about it.

Preparation for the higher priesthood

When I was 11 years old, my father died, and at his funeral I was very touched as I heard the people speaking about what a kind man he had been. At the cemetery as they were lowering the casket down in the grave and starting to throw those shovels full of dirt and rocks down on the casket, I stood watching, thinking he was my hero, and I wondered what would ever happen to me having lost my father. I saw good men exercising the priesthood and doing what was right—the men who had helped in digging the grave and taking care of things—and I saw a good man push a five-dollar bill back into the hands of my mother, who had offered him some money for helping to dig the grave. He pushed that money back toward my mother and said, "No, you keep it because you will need this later on."

And so I would like to declare to all of you in these assemblies tonight, in the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood, isn't it interesting to see the wisdom of our Heavenly Father and His Son in putting all of these things together, how in the lesser priesthood we learn to do the temporal chores? We'll have temporal duties, learning in a humble, simple way those things that need to be done. This will teach us of service and of living the commandments of the Lord, preparing

us so that we someday will be advanced to the Melchizedek Priesthood, with all of the majesty and the eternal glory that that entails.

Maintaining standards of the priesthood

Those Aaronic Priesthood years were interesting years in my life. I was always learning new things and always getting a little broader concept and feeling about the gospel and our responsibility in carrying this message out to all the world. In that process we learned to mingle with other people. Sometimes we have the feeling that people might not accept us because we have higher standards. There are things that we don't do. We have the Word of Wisdom, which helps us to live a healthier life, a type of life that is conducive to our growing into manhood and having the standards and ideals and a way of living that most of the world would like to have. I found that if you live the way you should live, people notice it and are impressed with your beliefs, and then you have an influence on other people's lives. When they find out that they don't have to indulge in the smoking or the drinking or the pot—the drugs that are affecting the world so negatively—the fact that you don't do that has an influence on those people.

Maintaining your standards qualifies you for marriage in the temple. Incidentally, this is the 173rd Annual General Conference of the Church, and my wife and I have been married 73 years. So the year we were married, the Church was holding the 100th annual conference. I can remember that as I was holding Ruby's hand across the altar of the temple—listening to the words of the sealing ceremony—I had a special feeling in my heart, not only of the sacredness of it but of the responsibility I had to live as I should live, to take care of her and our children, and then our grandchildren, and then the other generations that would come along. I was determined to set an example of liv-

ing the way a person can live in honoring the priesthood and our marriage covenant.

Responsibilities of priesthood holders

Tonight while we meet as priesthood holders, just think of the responsibility each one of us has as we consider what has to come about in this world—probably new things that we are not aware of today—after this war is over and things have been put back the way they should be. There's so much for us to do. For us to do it, we need to be worthy of the priesthood that we have so we can help in leading out as the Church moves on, perhaps in a broader way than we've ever done before. What a day that will be!

A few years ago, when I was in the navy during World War II, I received orders to report to the fleet headquarters at Pearl Harbor. My family took me to Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay, where I boarded the plane there, an old sea plane called a Pan-American clipper. On board that plane were some high-ranking medical officers going out to prepare and build up the hospital support because the battle of Tarawa would be taking place within a few weeks. Because of my rank, I was assigned to sleep in a sleeping bag out in the tail of that plane, where I could see the starboard engines as we were flying over San Francisco, which was under military blackout. It was black as we were flying out over the Pacific, and I thought the starboard engine on that old Pan-American plane was on fire. I couldn't sleep as I watched it throughout the entire flight.

During that sleepless night I wondered about my own life and whether I had been living up to the opportunities that would be mine and the responsibility that would be mine as a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood—the responsibility to be an example and to live the way I should so that I would be able to fulfill the calls that might come to me. In that sleepless night I took an inventory of myself, of my atti-

tudes, wondering if I was doing all that I might. Even though I had always accepted my Church assignments, I wondered if I was fulfilling them with all of my heart, might, mind, and soul and living up to the responsibility, the blessing, that I received as a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood and what would be expected of any of us who received this blessing.

Looking back on that sleepless night, I thank the Lord for His blessings today and for all that I have had the opportunity to be involved in. I try always to live the gospel to the fullest, to do everything I am called on to do with all of my heart, might, mind, and strength, to fulfill any call that might come to me so I may be qualified to do whatever I might be asked to do someday.

Resolve to live the way you should

On this night when we are honoring the priesthood, you young men of the priesthood, resolve to live the way you

should. Don't be caught up in some of the silly things that are going on in the world, but bear in mind what has been given to you. I will repeat again, priesthood is the power and authority delegated to man by our Heavenly Father. The authority and the majesty of it are beyond our comprehension.

I bear you my witness, my testimony, that this work is true. I'm glad to be able, in the twilight of my life, to stand and bear witness of the truthfulness of the gospel, as I have witnessed it all the days of my life from my baptism on until the present time. I love the Lord. I love our Heavenly Father and this work. I bear witness to the truthfulness of this work.

And to all of you priesthood leaders, live as you should. We are different, and it is not good for you to be like everybody else because you hold the priesthood of God, with those great promises and blessings and expectations of you.

This work is true. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Daryl H. Garn

Preparing for basketball—and missions

At a recent stake conference, a returned missionary spoke on the subject of preparing for missionary service. He used the analogy of a father saying to his son, "I will be happy when you play in your first basketball game so you can learn to dribble and shoot the basketball." He compared that example to a father saying to his son, "I will be happy when you go on your mission so you can learn to be a good person and teach the gospel." This analogy had a significant impact on me as I reflected on my life.

When I was a young boy, my greatest desire was to play basketball. Fortunately I had a father who was anxious to see that his son's desire was met. Dad and I would

practice the basics of passing and dribbling the basketball hour after hour in our small kitchen. I would listen to college basketball games on the radio and dream of playing college ball someday. Serving a mission was far from my mind at that time; consequently, I spent very little effort in missionary preparation.

In an attempt to ensure some balance in my life, my dad—who had not held a Church calling in many years—accepted the call to serve as my Scoutmaster. He operated by the book, and due to his diligence some of my friends and I became Eagle Scouts. I realize now that Scouting is great preparation for a mission.

My boyhood dream came true when I made the basketball team at Utah State University. During my second year at Utah

State, a returned missionary befriended me. Because of his example I began looking at my associates at school, including those on the basketball team, and realized that the people I most wanted to be like were those who had served missions. With the kind and loving mentoring of my good friend—and, I am sure, as a result of my mother's prayers and good example—my desires changed. After my second year at Utah State, I was called to serve in the Western Canadian Mission.

Three months into my mission, a new missionary from Idaho was assigned to be my companion. We had been together only a few days when I realized something very significant: my new companion knew the gospel, while I only knew the discussions. How I wished that I had prepared to be a missionary as hard as I had prepared to be a basketball player. My companion had prepared for his mission throughout his life and was immediately a valuable member of the team. How important it is for fathers and sons to work together on the basics in preparing for a mission.

I believe it is appropriate to compare the game of basketball to missionary work. The game of basketball includes not only the time you compete with another team on the court but also the hours of proper training and practice. The great work of saving souls is not limited to the two years that you serve a mission but, rather, requires years of righteous living and preparation in order to meet the standard for full-time missionary service.

Raising the standard for missionaries

On January 11, 2003, as part of the worldwide leadership training broadcast, President Gordon B. Hinckley instructed priesthood leaders regarding missionary work. His remarks have caused each of us to reflect on our individual responsibility to share the gospel. President Hinckley said, "The time has come when we must raise the standards of those who are called

to serve as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world" ("Missionary Service," *First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 2003, 17).

Early preparation of missionaries

There are two aspects of raising the standard for missionary service that we would do well to consider. The first is early preparation of young men and women. In their letter introducing some modifications to the Young Men and Young Women programs, the First Presidency said, "As youth work on these goals, they will develop skills and attributes that will lead them to the temple and prepare them for a lifetime of service to their families and the Lord" (First Presidency letter, 28 Sept. 2001). Listen carefully to their words: "develop skills and attributes." As parents and leaders of youth, we need to help our young people identify these skills and attributes.

Personal worthiness of missionaries

The second aspect is personal worthiness, which comes through keeping the commandments of God. Some young men have had the notion that they can break the commandments, confess to their bishops one year before they plan to go on a mission, and then be worthy to serve. The repentance process is far more than planned confession followed by a waiting period. We often hear this question of one who has transgressed: "How long will I have to wait before I can go on my mission?" Keep in mind that repentance is not simply a waiting game. The Savior said: "And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 9:20).

Now is the time to kindle that fire. President Hinckley has said, "We simply cannot permit those who have not qualified themselves as to worthiness to go into

the world to speak the glad tidings of the gospel" (*First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 2003, 17). We now understand from the First Presidency's statement on missionary work that there are transgressions that will disqualify young men and women from missionary service (see "Statement on Missionary Work" attached to First Presidency letter, 11 Dec. 2002).

President James E. Faust said: "There need to be some absolutes in life. There are some things that should not ever be done, some lines that should never be crossed, vows that should never be broken, words that should never be spoken, and thoughts that should never be entertained" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, 74; or *Ensign*, May 1982, 48).

The bar for missionary service has been raised. "Those individuals not able to meet the physical, mental, and emotional demands of full-time missionary work are honorably excused. . . . They may be called to serve in other rewarding capacities" ("Statement on Missionary Work" attached to First Presidency letter, 11 Dec. 2002). We believe that by following the guidelines outlined by the First Presidency, there will be an increase in the number of full-time missionaries who are worthy and prepared to serve.

Examples to follow

In sports we often have great athletes whom we admire, and we strive to develop skills to become like them. In our

spiritual lives we also have great examples to follow, the greatest being our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who responded to Thomas's question, "How can we know the way?" (John 14:5).

The scriptures record Jesus saying, "I am the way" (John 14:6). In 2 Nephi we read: "Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?" (2 Nephi 31:10).

My young friends, there are many who are following "the way" of the Savior whom you can follow as your example as you prepare for missionary service. You will find them among your family, your friends, and your Church leaders. Even today I count as one of my greatest blessings those dear friends who set the proper example by following the Savior.

Be the greatest generation of missionaries

It is my prayer that you young men will be diligent in your righteous desires, that you will be successful in all that you do, and that you will be, as Elder M. Russell Ballard has said, "the greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 50; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 47).

I testify, as President Hinckley recently said of missionary service, that "there is no greater work. There is no more important work" (*First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 2003, 21). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Bishop H. David Burton

And that's the way it is

Good evening. I love to gather with bearers of the priesthood of God and enjoy the worldwide brotherhood we share and cherish. A special spirit arises from the expectation we will be instructed in

the plain and precious parts of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This evening my remarks will be directed to the young men of the Church. You who find yourselves in a different age category are welcome to listen.

During this past Christmas season, news correspondent Walter Cronkite participated with the Tabernacle Choir and the Orchestra at Temple Square in their Christmas concert. “He . . . spent 19 years as the anchorman for the ‘CBS Evening News.’ . . . [Mr. Cronkite] earned the reputation as ‘the most trusted man in America.’”¹ When asked how he would want to be remembered, his response was, “Oh, as a fellow who did his best.”² Over his distinguished career, Mr. Cronkite concluded each news report with the phrase, “And that’s the way it is.” Tonight let’s talk about the way it is.

Repetitive reminders

At a recent stake conference, the stake president shared a story with me. He asked his son what was discussed at a recent Sunday evening fireside. The young man replied, “Raising the bar.” He then informed his father that he was weary of the theme because it was the subject of every recent class and meeting. My first thought was, “That’s great; the prophet’s message is being discussed, heard, and acted upon.” My second thought related to the young man’s feelings concerning repetitive reminders. Repetitive reminders can be an irritant when we are trying hard to do our best.

As a youth I would tune out my mother’s repetitive reminder: “David, remember who you are.” The reminder always brought some interesting comments from my friends. Irritation set in when my father repeatedly pointed out President George Albert Smith’s home as we traveled along 13th East in Salt Lake City and reminded me that a living prophet of God who loved me lived there. Today I am most grateful for those repetitive reminders.

Qualifying for spiritual events in our lives

The term “raising the bar” is often used in the world of sports to describe achieving higher levels of performance.

The use of a sports metaphor may help describe why it is critical to respond to what President Hinckley asked us to do last conference when he said: “I hope that our young men, and our young women, will rise to the challenge [Elder Ballard] has set forth. We must raise the bar on the worthiness and qualifications of those who go into the world as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³

A year ago we experienced a wonderful Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. For most Olympic events, athletes must attain minimum levels of achievement in order to qualify to compete. Our lives are similar to the Olympic qualification process in that we need to achieve and maintain standards in order to participate in the important *spiritual* events of life. World-class athletes have a disciplined daily routine. They master the skills demanded by their sport. Only then can they qualify to participate in the contest. And that’s the way it is.

Young men, if you want to be world class and qualified to be participants in the really important events of life like priesthood ordinations, blessings of the temple, and missionary service, you too must develop a disciplined daily routine of honesty, virtue, study, and prayer. And that’s the way it is.

The importance of obeying the rules

Olympians know and understand the *rules* that govern their sport. Broken rules can bring severe penalties and even disqualification. At the last Olympics, failure to observe rules associated with performance-enhancing drugs brought medal forfeiture. One of the harshest penalties levied on an athlete occurs in the game of golf. Just signing a scorecard with an incorrect score entered for any one of the 18 holes brings *disqualification*. There is zero tolerance. It doesn’t matter if the error benefits or hurts the individual; the penalty is the same—*disqualification*.

After more than 50 years, I can still hear the words of a tournament official: “Sorry, son, we must disqualify you for signing an incorrect scorecard.” My disqualification came as a result of my mentioning to the official that I needed to correct my score. For weeks I said to myself, “Why didn’t I remain silent? Besides, the error was an innocent mistake. The total score was correct.” Though my performance was good enough to find me in the winner’s circle, I left the awards presentation empty-handed. And that’s the way it is.

My young friends, rules are important, even critical. In life there are also penalties, perhaps even disqualification, if rules are broken. Our participation in life’s important events may be jeopardized if we fail to follow the rules contained in our Father in Heaven’s commands. Involvement in sexual sin, illegal drugs, civil disobedience, or abuse could keep us on the sidelines at key times. You would do well to view rules as *safety restraints*, not as *chains that bind*. Obedience builds strength. And that’s the way it is.

In 1834 the Prophet Joseph Smith recorded, “No month ever found me more busily engaged than November; but as my life consisted of activity and unyielding exertions, I made this my rule: *When the Lord commands, do it.*”⁴

A superb support team for youth

For some, sports are a business. The difference between winning and losing can be a substantial amount of money. Athletes hire agents to handle their business affairs. Agents, personal trainers, coaches, and managers assist the athlete to enhance performance.

Our Father in Heaven has provided His precious young sons with a superb support team more than equal to the one used by the athlete. Our parents make *superb agents*. They look after our interests. They are not only interested in us, but be-

cause they love us, they are terrific consultants as well.

The Apostle Paul in teaching the Colossians said, “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:20). In addition to our parents, think about the vast support network that has been provided to enhance our *spiritual* performance. Our bishops serve as *personal trainers* and use their sacred priesthood keys to bless our lives. Seminary teachers, quorum advisers, and home teachers round out the support team which has been assembled by the Lord to help us prepare for the big games of life. As you follow and obey, your performance will steadily improve. When the Lord commands, do it. And that’s the way it is.

Focusing on what is truly important

One of the defining differences between the good and the great is what sports psychologists call *focus*. Competitors who have the ability to set aside the unimportant and be completely attentive to that which is critical are able to improve their performance. Focus is a critical success factor.

I overheard a conversation between golfing great Arnold Palmer and a young caddie he was using for the first time. The young caddie, while handing Mr. Palmer his club, told him the distance to the flag was 165 yards, there was an unseen stream on the left, and a long and treacherous rough on the right. In a very kind but firm way, Mr. Palmer reminded the young man that the only information he required was the distance to the hole. He further suggested he didn’t want to lose focus by worrying about what was on the right or left.

It is easy to lose sight of the really important objectives of life. There is much to distract us. Some are floundering in the water hazards on the left, and others are finding the long, treacherous rough on the right insurmountable. Safety and success

come when focus is maintained on the important opportunities found by driving the ball straight down the middle—priesthood advancement, temple worthiness, and missionary service. And that's the way it is.

May our Father in Heaven bless each one of you. I testify to one and all that Jesus is the Christ. He lives, and His love for us is perfect. I'm grateful for a great prophet who helps us understand that when the Lord commands, do it, because that's the way it is. In the name of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. "Walter Cronkite: A Lifetime Reporting the News," *Voices from The Smithsonian*

Associates, Internet, www.smithsonianassociates.org/programs/cronkite/cronkite.htm.

2. Kira Albin, "That's the Way It Is . . . with Walter Cronkite," *Grand Times*, Internet, www.grandtimes.com/cronkite.html.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 63; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 57.
4. *History of the Church*, 2:170.

President Monson

We will now be pleased to hear from President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Following President Faust's remarks, the choir and congregation will sing "Sweet is the Work." It will then be my opportunity to speak to you.

President James E. Faust

The Devil's Throat

My dear brethren of the priesthood, tonight I address my remarks to all of you, but in particular to the young men. My purpose is to instruct and warn you of dangers that lie ahead, but I also want to express my love for you and the great confidence I have in you as the rising generation.

As a young man I served a mission to Brazil. It was a marvelous experience. One of the wonders of the world in that great country is Iguacú Falls. In the flood season, the volume of water spilling over the brink is the largest in the world. Every few minutes, millions of gallons of water cascade into the chasm below. One part of the falls, where the deluge is the heaviest, is called the Devil's Throat.

There are some large rocks standing just above, before the water rushes down into the Devil's Throat. Years ago, reckless boatmen would take passengers in canoes to stand on those rocks and look down into the Devil's Throat. The water above the falls is usually calm and slow moving,

and the atmosphere tranquil. Only the roar of the water below forewarns of the danger lurking just a few feet away. A sudden, unexpected current could take a canoe into the rushing waters, over the cliff, and down into the Devil's Throat. Those foolish enough to leave the canoes to stand on these treacherous wet rocks could so easily lose their footing and be swept away into the swirling currents below.

The only safe course

I recognize that some of you think of yourselves as daredevils, ready to take on almost any challenge. But some of these excursions for excitement will inevitably take you down into the Devil's Throat. The only safe course is to stay well away from the dangers of the Devil's Throat. President George Albert Smith strongly cautioned, "If you cross to the devil's side of the line one inch, you are in the tempter's power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the spirit of the Lord."¹

Some of you young men may be letting others set your standards. You defend this by saying, "Who said we shouldn't do this or we shouldn't do that?" There are so many shades of right and wrong that each of you has to decide where the line will be. I strongly urge you that if there is any question in your minds or hearts about whether your personal conduct is right or wrong, don't do it. Each of us has moral agency, and the gift of the Holy Ghost will sharpen our impressions of what is right and wrong, true and false. It is the responsibility of the prophets of God to teach the word of God, not to spell out every jot and tittle of human conduct. If we are conscientiously trying to avoid not only evil but the very appearance of evil, we will act for ourselves and not be acted upon.²

The opposing forces of good and evil

Much of what comes from the devil is alluring and enticing. It glitters and is appealing to the sensual parts of our nature. His message sounds so reasonable and easy to justify. His voice is usually smooth and intriguing. If it were harsh or discordant, nobody would listen, nobody would be enticed. Some of Satan's most appealing messages are: Everyone does it; if it doesn't hurt anybody else, it's all right; if you feel there is no harm in it, it's okay; it's the "cool" thing to do. Satan is the greatest imitator, the master deceiver, the arch counterfeiter, and the greatest forger ever in the history of the world. He comes into our lives as a thief in the night. His disguise is so perfect that it is hard to recognize him or his methods. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

There have always been two great competing forces in the world. These began before the world was created. These opposing forces are the forces of good and evil. Between these two powerful forces each of us is caught in a tug-of-war. In simple terms, that which is good comes from God, and that which is evil comes from

the devil.³ You can't have it both ways and find true happiness; some have tried, but in the long run all have failed. If any of you young men think you can have it both ways, you are only deceiving yourselves. It doesn't work that way. It never has. It never will.

Everything has a price

My dear young friends, there is another great truth that you young men must learn. It is that everything has a price. There is a price to pay for success, fulfillment, accomplishment, and joy. There are no freebies. If you don't pay the price that is needed for success, you will pay the price of failure. Preparation, work, study, and service are required to achieve and find happiness. Disobedience and lack of preparation carry a terrible price tag.

As priesthood holders of this Church, part of the price we need to pay is to live differently from the world. We are the possessors and custodians of these commanding powers which can and do roll back the power of Satan on the earth. With all my heart I urge you to please help us push back the world. We must stand against the wind. Sometimes we must be unpopular and simply say, "This is not right."

All of us want to find out who we really are and what our place is in the world. Some of you young people are trying to find your identity by being different from your parents and families in what they stand for. God made each of us to be different from anyone else in the world, as our DNA and fingerprints prove. You don't have to work at having a separate identity; you already have one.

The consequences of disobedience

Some young people want to rebel against restraints. Some of you think it isn't "cool" to be obedient to your parents or to follow the counsel of your bishop

or quorum president. Bishop Richard C. Edgley shared an experience he had as a young boy about the consequences of being reckless and disobedient:

"When I was a young boy, our garage and the neighbor's garage were about five feet apart. The neighbor's garage was very old and dilapidated, and some of the boards were breaking. I, on occasion, would climb onto our garage and jump from one garage to the other and play on top of them. My father had told me, 'Stay off the garages,' but I didn't. One time when I was playing on them, I jumped from our garage and fell through the roof of the neighbor's garage, scraping my back and legs badly. Because I had been disobedient, I foolishly decided not to tell anyone that I had hurt myself. I went in the house and washed the scrapes and scratches as well as I could, but I couldn't reach the ones on my back to put antiseptic on them or even wash them clean. I bore the burden of pain, worry over infection setting in, and guilt for several days while the healing process took place."⁴

As someone once said, "One of the best things in the world to be is a boy; it requires no experience, but needs some practice to be a good one."⁵

Some of you may have been deceived by thinking that you can find excitement by dabbling in drugs, alcohol, pornography, and illicit sex. I warn you that such enticements as these are slippery and dangerous like the rocks by the Devil's Throat, and they will only lead you into Satan's territory. The way out of that kind of danger is difficult and will leave you with far more than a few scrapes and scratches.

Be stronger spiritually to withstand evil

You young men will be working out your eternal destiny at an interesting time. In the future there will continue to be an increase in scientific discoveries and inventions which will make life more comfortable and easier for many. No doubt

medical science will continue to find new treatments and cures not available now. In contrast, the worldly influences of evil will likely increase, and more people will become vulnerable to the deceit and enticement of Satan. You young men will need to become stronger spiritually and morally in order to withstand the temptations and snares of the world. Perhaps this is why such special spirits have been reserved for this time.

I also believe that in the future the opposition from Satan will be both more subtle and more open. While in some ways it may be more blatant, it will be masked with greater sophistication and cunning. We will need greater spirituality to perceive all the forms of evil and greater strength to resist it.

Warning to those serving in the military

Many countries now face the dangers of terrorism. War exposes people to bodily harm, but there is also exposure to moral harm. Those of us who have served in the military in wartime have experienced the disruption in life that comes from being uprooted from home and family, wholesome associations, and the influence of the organized Church. I warn those who are now serving in the military, or who may do so, against the pitfalls of these disruptions. They can take us into the very jaws of the Devil's Throat.

Many of the activities you will be engaged in are group situations where you cannot always choose your own company. But you can choose your standards. In the military you belong to an outfit where part of its strength comes from the unity of its members. You need to be loyal to the members of your unit because the fellow who is next to you may save your life tomorrow! But that doesn't mean you have to lower your moral standards. In any association there needs to be one or more who stand up and say, "What we are do-

ing is not right.” It takes moral courage to do this!

The Church recently republished the servicemen’s edition of *Principles of the Gospel* for members of the Church serving in the military anywhere in the world. While it is now available only in English, it will be translated into other languages. This excellent resource contains instructions for Church activity and the wearing of the garment in the military, priesthood ordinances and blessings, gospel topics, and a few selected hymns. We had a similar resource available to those of us who served in the military in World War II. I found it to be invaluable.

Sifting the wheat from the tares

There is a continuing sifting process going on. We are reminded of the parable of the wheat and the tares. In that parable the Lord said, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field,” but while he slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the grain, so that when the blades of wheat sprouted, so did the weeds. The man’s workers did not understand how weeds got into the field and asked if they should go and pull the weeds. The owner of the field said no, because while you pull the weeds, you also pull up the grain. So he counseled that the grain and the weeds grow together until the time of harvest, when the wheat would be bundled separately from the weeds.⁶

The disciples of Jesus asked the Savior for an interpretation of the parable, and the Savior answered:

“He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

“The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

“The enemy that sowed them is the devil; . . . and the reapers are the angels.

“As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.”⁷

This parable confirms the statement of Alma which I wish to repeat: “Whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.”⁸

Stand firm and steady

Brethren, we are living in a challenging time, and it is a time for us to stand firm and steady in meeting our family and priesthood responsibilities. We should not be blown “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”⁹ We should go forward in a spirit of faith and not be fearful of anything except being too close to the Devil’s Throat. We will be strengthened and preserved if we follow the counsel and direction of President Gordon B. Hinckley, who is at the helm. I have a special witness that he is our prophet, seer, and revelator. He is the mouthpiece of God on the earth today. I pray the Lord’s blessings to be with us all, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, sel. Preston Nibley (1948), 43.
2. See 2 Nephi 2:13, 26.
3. See Alma 5:40.
4. “Friend to Friend,” *Friend*, Feb. 1995, 6.
5. Charles Dudley Warner, *Thesaurus of Quotations*, ed. Edmund Fuller (1941), 115.
6. Matthew 13:24–30.
7. Matthew 13:37–40.
8. Alma 5:40.
9. James 1:6.

The choir and congregation sang
“Sweet Is the Work.”

President Thomas S. Monson

Let every man learn his duty

We are assembled this evening as a mighty body of the priesthood, both here in the Conference Center and in locations throughout the world. Some hold the Aaronic Priesthood, while others bear the Melchizedek Priesthood.

President Stephen L. Richards, who served as a counselor to President David O. McKay, declared, “The Priesthood is usually simply defined as ‘the power of God delegated to man.’” He continues:

“This definition, I think, is accurate. But for practical purposes I like to define the Priesthood in terms of service and I frequently call it ‘the perfect plan of service.’ . . . It is an instrument of service. . . . And the man who fails to use it is apt to lose it, for we are plainly told by revelation that he who neglects it ‘shall not be counted worthy to stand.’”¹

In the Pioneer Stake, located in Salt Lake City and where I received both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood, we were taught to become familiar with the scriptures, including sections 20, 84, and 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In these sections we learn about priesthood and Church government.

Tonight I wish to emphasize one verse from section 107: “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence.”²

President Harold B. Lee frequently taught: “When one becomes a holder of the priesthood, he becomes an agent of the Lord. He should think of his calling as though he were on the Lord’s errand.”³

We also learn from these sections the duties of quorum presidencies and the fact that we are responsible for others besides ourselves.

Rescuing those who fall by the wayside

I firmly believe that the Church today is stronger than it has ever been. Activity levels of our youth testify that this is a generation of faith and devotion to truth. Yet there are some who drop by the wayside, who find other interests that persuade them to neglect their Church duties. We must not lose such precious souls.

There are growing numbers among the prospective elders who are not found in Church meetings or filling Church assignments. This situation can and must be remedied. The task is ours. Responsibility needs to be assigned and effort put forth without delay.

The presidencies of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums, under the leadership of the bishopric and quorum advisers, can be empowered to reach out and rescue.

Said the Lord, “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; . . . and how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!”⁴

Gideon’s overwhelming task

Sometimes the task appears overwhelming. We can take fresh courage from the experience of Gideon of old, who, with his modest force, was to do battle with the Midianites and the Amalekites. You will remember how Gideon and his army faced an overwhelming strength of forces vastly superior in equipment and in number. The book of Judges in the Old Testament records that the united enemy, the Midianites and the Amalekites, “lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.”⁵ Gideon went to Almighty God for his strength.

To his surprise, Gideon was advised by the Lord that his forces were too many

in number for the Lord to deliver the enemy into their hands, lest they say, "Mine own hand hath saved me."⁶ Gideon was instructed to proclaim to his people: "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart . . . from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand."⁷

Then the Lord said, "The people are yet too many."⁸ He instructed Gideon to take the men to water to observe the manner in which they should drink of the water. Those who lapped the water were placed in one group, and those who bowed down upon their knees to drink were placed in another. The Lord said unto Gideon, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place."⁹

Gideon returned to his forces and said to them, "Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."¹⁰ Then he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them:

"Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

"When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side . . . and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." He then said in effect, "Follow me." His exact words were, "As I do, so shall ye do."¹¹

At the leader's signal, the host of Gideon did blow on the trumpets and did break the pitchers and did shout, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." The scripture records the outcome of this decisive battle: "And they stood every man in his place," and the victory was won.¹²

Home teaching—a divine service

Home teaching is part of today's plan to rescue. When it was introduced by President David O. McKay to all of the General Authorities, he counseled:

"Home teaching is one of our most urgent and most rewarding opportunities to nurture and inspire, to counsel and direct our Father's children. . . . [It] is a divine service, a divine call. It is our duty as Home Teachers to carry the divine spirit into every home and heart."¹³

In certain areas where adequate Melchizedek Priesthood strength is missing, stake presidents and bishops, coordinating with the mission president, may use full-time missionaries to visit less-active and part-member families. Not only does this rekindle the missionary spirit in the home, but it also provides an ideal opportunity for quality referrals to be obtained.

Examples of successful reactivation

Over the years as I have visited many stakes throughout the world, there have been those stakes where ward and stake leaders, out of necessity or in response to duty, stopped wringing their hands, rolled up their sleeves, and, with the Lord's help, went to work and brought precious men to qualify for the Melchizedek Priesthood and, with their wives and children, to enter the holy temple for their endowments and sealings. In brief form I will mention several examples.

On a visit to the Millcreek Stake in Salt Lake City some years ago, I learned that just over 100 brethren who were prospective elders had been ordained elders during the preceding year. I asked President James Clegg the secret of his success. Although he was too modest to take the credit, one of his counselors revealed that President Clegg, recognizing the challenge,

had undertaken to personally call and arrange a private appointment between him and each prospective elder. During the appointment, President Clegg would mention the temple of the Lord, the saving ordinances and covenants emphasized there, and would conclude with this question: "Wouldn't you desire to take your sweet wife and your precious children to the house of the Lord, that you might be a forever family throughout the eternities?" An acknowledgment followed, the reactivation process was pursued, and the goal was achieved.

In 1952 the majority of the families in the Rose Park Third Ward were members whose fathers or husbands held only the Aaronic Priesthood, rather than the Melchizedek Priesthood. Brother L. Brent Goates was called to serve as the bishop. He invited a less-active brother in the ward, Ernest Skinner, to assist in activating the 29 adult brethren in the ward who held the office of teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood and to help these men and their families get to the temple. As a less-active member himself, Brother Skinner was reluctant at first but finally indicated that he would do what he could. He began personally visiting with the less-active adult teachers, trying to help them see their role as priesthood leaders in their homes and as husbands and fathers to their families. He soon enlisted some of the less-active brethren to assist him in his assignment. One by one they became fully active again and took their families to the temple.

One day the ward clerk came out of a grocery checking line to greet the last of the group to go to the temple. Commenting on his position as the last, the man said, "I stood by and watched as all of that group became active in our ward and went to the temple. If only I had been able to imagine how beautiful it was in the temple, and how it would change my life forever, I never would have been the last of 29 to be sealed in the temple."

In each of these situations there were four elements which led them to success:

1. The reactivation opportunity was pursued at the ward level.
2. The bishop of the ward was involved.
3. Qualified and inspired teachers were provided.
4. Attention was given to each individual.

Reach out to those who need to be rescued

Brethren, let us remember the counsel of King Benjamin: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God."¹⁴

Let us reach out to rescue those who so need our help and lift them to the higher road and the better way. Let us focus our thinking on the needs of priesthood holders and their wives and children who have slipped from the path of activity. May we listen to the unspoken message from their hearts:

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.¹⁵

The work of reactivation is no task for the idler or dreamer. Children grow, parents age, and time waits for no man. Don't postpone a prompting; rather, act on it, and the Lord will open the way.

Patience is needed in activation efforts

Frequently the heavenly virtue of patience is required. As a bishop I felt prompted one day to call on a man whose wife was somewhat active, as were the children. This man, however, had never responded. It was a hot summer's day when I knocked on the screen door of Harold G. Gallacher. I could see Brother Gallacher sitting in his chair reading the newspaper. "Who is it?" he queried without looking up.

"Your bishop," I replied. "I've come to get acquainted and to urge your attendance with your family at our meetings."

"No, I'm too busy," came the disdaining response. He never looked up. I thanked him for listening and departed the doorstep.

The Gallacher family moved to California shortly thereafter. The years went by. Then, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, I was working in my office one day when my secretary called, saying, "A Brother Gallacher who once lived in your ward would like to talk to you. He's here in my office."

I responded, "Ask him if his name is Harold G. Gallacher, who, with his family, lived at Vissing Place on West Temple and Fifth South."

She said, "He is the man."

I asked her to send him in. We had a pleasant conversation together concerning his family. He told me, "I've come to apologize for not getting out of my chair and letting you in the door that summer day long years ago." I asked him if he was active in the Church. With a wry smile, he replied, "I'm now second counselor in my ward bishopric. Your invitation to come out to church, and my negative response, so haunted me that I determined to do something about it."

Harold and I visited together on numerous occasions before he passed away. The Gallachers and their children filled many callings in the Church. One of the youngest grandchildren is now serving a full-time mission.

Seeds may take time to root and flower

To the many missionaries who may be listening this evening, I share the observation that the seeds of testimony frequently do not immediately take root and flower. Bread cast upon the water returns, at times, only after many days. But it does return.

I answered the ring of my telephone one evening to hear a voice ask, "Are you related to an Elder Monson who years ago served in the New England Mission?"

I answered that such was not the case. The caller introduced himself as a Brother Leonardo Gambardella and then mentioned that an Elder Monson and an Elder Bonner called at his home long ago and bore their testimonies to him and his wife. They had listened but had done nothing further to apply their teachings. Subsequently they moved to California, where, some 13 years later, they again found the truth and were converted and baptized. Brother Gambardella then asked if there were any way he could reach the elders who first had visited with them, that he might express his profound gratitude for their testimonies, which had remained with him and his wife.

I checked the records. I located the elders, now married with families of their own. Can you imagine their surprise when I telephoned them and told them the good news—even the culmination of their early efforts? They instantly remembered the Gambardellas. I arranged a conference telephone call so they could personally extend their congratulations and welcome them into the Church. They did. There were tears, but they were tears of joy.

Edwin Markham penned these lines:

There is a destiny that makes us
brothers;
None goes his way alone:
All that we send into the lives of others
Comes back into our own.¹⁶

Stand in your appointed place

Tonight I pray that all of us who hold the priesthood may sense our responsibilities, that we, like Gideon of old, may stand every man in his appointed place and, as one, follow our Leader—even the Lord Jesus Christ—and His prophet, President

Gordon B. Hinckley. May we reach out and rescue those who have fallen by the wayside, that not one precious soul will be lost. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 46.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 107:99.
3. *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (1974), 255.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10, 13.
5. Judges 7:12.
6. Judges 7:2.
7. Judges 7:3.
8. Judges 7:4.
9. Judges 7:7.
10. Judges 7:15.
11. Judges 7:17–18.
12. Judges 7:18, 21; see also Judges 6–7.
13. *Priesthood Home Teaching Handbook*, rev. ed. (1967), ii–iii.
14. Mosiah 2:17.
15. “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.
16. “A Creed,” in James Dalton, ed., *Masterspieces of Religious Verse* (1948), 464.

President Monson

We remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 tomorrow morning. The Sunday morning session will immediately follow.

Daylight saving time begins tomorrow at 2:00 A.M. We encourage you to move your clocks ahead one hour before you retire this evening. Remind your wife to remind you.

As you leave this priesthood meeting tonight, we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

We express our gratitude to the Melchizedek Priesthood choir for the beautiful music they have provided this evening. Following the remarks of President Gordon B. Hinckley, the Lord’s prophet, this session will conclude with the choir singing “More Holiness Give Me.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Spencer J. Condie of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Meeting in the bonds of brotherhood

There is not another meeting in all the world comparable to this meeting. Wherever we may be, whatever the language we speak, we are all men who have had hands laid upon our heads to receive the priesthood of God. Whether we be boys who have received the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood, or men who have received the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood, we each have had bestowed upon us something wonderful and magnificent, something of the very essence of godhood.

I repeat, there is no gathering in all the world like this. We meet together in the bonds of brotherhood, in a vast assemblage of men who have been endowed with a certain power or authority, honored

with the privilege of speaking and acting in the name of the Almighty. The Lord God of heaven has seen fit to confer upon us something of that which is uniquely His. I sometimes wonder if we are worthy of it. I wonder if we really appreciate it. I wonder about the infinity of this power and authority. It is concerned with life and death, with family and Church, with the great and transcendent nature of God Himself and His eternal work.

Brethren, I greet you as members of quorums of the holy priesthood. I greet you as servants of the living God, who has laid upon each of us a responsibility from which we must not and cannot shrink.

In harmony with that greeting, I have chosen to speak on various aspects of one word. That word is *loyalty*.

Loyalty to your best self

I think of loyalty in terms of being true to ourselves. I think of it in terms of being absolutely faithful to our chosen companions. I think of it in terms of being absolutely loyal to the Church and its many facets of activity. I think of it in terms of being unequivocally true to the God of heaven, our Eternal Father, and His Beloved Son, our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must be true to the very best that is in us. We are sons of God, honored to hold His divine authority. But we live in a world of evil. There is a constant power pulling us down, inviting us to partake of those things which are totally inconsistent with the divine priesthood which we hold. It is interesting to observe how the father of lies, that wily son of the morning who was cast out of heaven, always has the means and capacity to entice, to invite, to gather to his ways those who are not strong and alert. Very recently a certain moving picture was acclaimed the best of the year. I have not seen it, nor do I anticipate doing so. But I am told that it is laden with sex, that the use of profanity runs throughout.

Pornography is one of the hallmarks of our time. Its producers grow rich on the gullibility of those who like to watch it. In the opening lines of the revelation which we call the Word of Wisdom, the Lord declares, "In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation" (D&C 89:4).

He then goes on to talk about the food we put into our mouths. The same language might be applied with reference to that which we take into our minds when we indulge in pornography.

Brethren, every man and boy within the sound of my voice knows what is de-

grading. You do not need a road map to foretell where indulgence will take you. Contrast that with the beauty, the peace, the wonderful feeling that comes of living near to the Lord and rising above the insidious narcotic practices that are all about us.

This applies to you, my dear boys who are in this meeting. You are particular targets for the adversary. If he can get you now, he knows he may win you for a lifetime. There has been implanted within you wondrous powers and instincts for a divine purpose. However, when these are perverted, they become destroyers rather than builders.

I am profoundly grateful for the strength of our youth. But I know also that some slip away from us. Every loss is a tragedy. The kingdom of our Lord needs you. Be worthy of it. Be loyal to your best selves. Never stoop to anything that would take from you the strength to abstain.

To you men I issue a challenge. Run from the tide of sleaze that would overcome you. Flee the evils of the world. Be loyal to your better self. Be loyal to the best that is in you. Be faithful and true to the covenants that are associated with the priesthood of God. You cannot wallow about in lasciviousness, you cannot lie, you cannot cheat, you cannot take advantage of others in unrighteousness without denying that touch of divinity with which each of us came into this life. I would pray with all of my strength, brethren, that we would rise above it and be loyal to our best selves.

Loyalty to your wife

Be loyal in your family relationships. I have witnessed much of the best and much of the worst in marriage. Every week I have the responsibility of acting on requests for cancellation of temple sealings. Divorce has become a very common phenomenon throughout the world. Even where it is not legal, men and women simply step over

the line and live together. I am grateful to be able to say that divorce is much less frequent with those married in the temple. But even among these there is far more divorce than there should be.

The bride and groom come to the house of the Lord professing their love one for another. They enter into solemn and eternal covenants with each other and with the Lord. Their relationship is sealed in an eternal compact. No one expects every marriage to work out perfectly. But one might expect that every marriage in the house of the Lord would carry with it a covenant of loyalty one to another.

I have long felt that the greatest factor in a happy marriage is an anxious concern for the comfort and well-being of one's companion. In most cases selfishness is the leading factor that causes argument, separation, divorce, and broken hearts.

Brethren, the Lord expects something better of us. He expects something better than is to be found in the world. Never forget that it was you who selected your companion. It was you who felt that there was no one else in all the world quite like her. It was you who wished to have her forever. But in too many cases the image of the temple experience fades. A lustful desire may be the cause. Faultfinding replaces praise. When we look for the worst in anyone, we will find it. But if we will concentrate on the best, that element will grow until it sparkles.

I am not without personal experience. Sister Hinckley and I will soon have been married for 66 years. I do not know how she has put up with me all this long time. Now we have grown old. But how grateful I am for her. How anxious I am to see that she is comfortable. How much I desire the very best for her. What a wonderful companion she has been. What a marvelous wife and what a tremendous mother and grandmother and great-grandmother.

You, of course, have heard of the man who lived to a ripe old age and was asked

by reporters to what he attributed his longevity. He replied that when he and his wife were married they determined that if they argued, one would leave the house and go outside. He said, "Gentlemen, I attribute my longevity to the fact that I have breathed so much fresh air during all these many years."

Brethren, be loyal to your companion. May your marriage be blessed with an uncompromising loyalty one to another. Find your happiness with one another. Give your companion the opportunity to grow in her own interests, to develop her own talents, to fly in her own way, and to experience her own sense of accomplishment.

Loyalty to the Church

Now may I say a word concerning loyalty to the Church.

We see much indifference. There are those who say, "The Church won't dictate to me how to think about this, that, or the other, or how to live my life."

No, I reply, the Church will not dictate to any man how he should think or what he should do. The Church will point out the way and invite every member to live the gospel and enjoy the blessings that come of such living. The Church will not dictate to any man, but it will counsel, it will persuade, it will urge, and it will expect loyalty from those who profess membership therein.

When I was a university student, I said to my father on one occasion that I felt the General Authorities had overstepped their prerogatives when they advocated a certain thing. He was a very wise and good man. He said, "The President of the Church has instructed us, and I sustain him as prophet, seer, and revelator and intend to follow his counsel."

I have now served in the general councils of this Church for 45 years. I have served as an Assistant to the Twelve, as a member of the Twelve, as a counselor in

the First Presidency, and now for eight years as President. I want to give you my testimony that although I have sat in literally thousands of meetings where Church policies and programs have been discussed, I have never been in one where the guidance of the Lord was not sought nor where there was any desire on the part of anyone present to advocate or do anything which would be injurious or coercive to anyone.

The book of Revelation declares:

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15–16).

I make you a promise, my dear brethren, that while I am serving in my present responsibility I will never consent to nor advocate any policy, any program, any doctrine that will be otherwise than beneficial to the membership of this, the Lord’s Church.

This is His work. He established it. He has revealed its doctrine. He has outlined its practices. He created its government. It is His work and His kingdom, and He has said, “They who are not for me are against me” (2 Nephi 10:16).

In 1933 there was a movement in the United States to overturn the law which prohibited commerce in alcoholic beverages. When it came to a vote, Utah was the deciding state.

I was on a mission, working in London, England, when I read the newspaper headlines that screamed, “Utah Kills Prohibition.”

President Heber J. Grant, then President of this Church, had pleaded with our people against voting to nullify Prohibition. It broke his heart when so many members of the Church in this state disregarded his counsel.

On this occasion I am not going to talk about the good or bad of Prohibition

but rather about uncompromising loyalty to the Church.

How grateful, my brethren, I feel, how profoundly grateful for the tremendous faith of so many Latter-day Saints who, when facing a major decision on which the Church has taken a stand, align themselves with that position. And I am especially grateful to be able to say that among those who are loyal are men and women of achievement, of accomplishment, of education, of influence, of strength—highly intelligent and capable individuals.

Each of us has to face the matter—either the Church is true, or it is a fraud. There is no middle ground. It is the Church and kingdom of God, or it is nothing.

Thank you, my dear brethren—you men of great strength and great fidelity and great faith and great loyalty.

Loyalty to God

Finally, loyalty to God, our Eternal Father, and His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every man in this Church is entitled to the knowledge that God is our Eternal Father and His Beloved Son is our Redeemer. The Savior gave the key by which we may have such knowledge. He declared, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17).

Judas Iscariot has gone down in history as the great betrayer, who sold his loyalty for 30 pieces of silver (see Matthew 26:15).

How many in our time, to quote the words of Paul, “crucify . . . the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” with profane and blasphemous language? (Hebrews 6:6).

You know of the profanity of the school grounds and the street. Avoid it. Never let it cross your lips. Show your loyalty to the God of heaven and to the

Redeemer of the world by holding Their names sacred.

Pray to your Heavenly Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and always, under all circumstances, by the very nature of your lives show your loyalty and your love.

Who's on the Lord's side? Who?
Now is the time to show.
We ask it fearlessly:
Who's on the Lord's side? Who?
[“Who's on the Lord's Side?” *Hymns*, no. 260]

May the blessings of heaven rest upon you and your families, my dear brethren. May each of us always be found to be true and faithful, men and boys of integrity and absolute loyalty, I pray in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “More Holiness Give Me.”

Elder Spencer J. Condie offered the benediction.

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth session of the 173rd Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, April 6, 2003. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen and Richard Elliott were the organists. The choir sang “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?” to begin the session. President Monson then made the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

My dear brothers and sisters, we welcome you to this, the fourth general session of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct the exercises.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, cable, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the facilities who are broadcasting the conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders and members of the Church who have assembled to worship together.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop, with Clay Christiansen and Richard Elliott at the organ.

The choir opened this session with the hymn “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?” and will now sing “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder William R. Walker of the Seventy.

Following the invocation, the choir will sing “He Sent His Son.” President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will then address us.

The choir sang “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.”

Elder William R. Walker offered the invocation.

The choir sang “He Sent His Son.”

President James E. Faust

Solace to heartbroken parents

My dear brothers and sisters and friends, my message this morning is one of hope and solace to heartbroken parents who have done their best to rear their children in righteousness with love and devotion but have despaired because a child has rebelled or been led astray to follow the path of evil and destruction. In contemplating your deep anguish, I am reminded of the words of Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, . . . Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted.” To this the Lord gave this welcome reassurance: “Refrain thy voice from weeping, . . . for thy work shall be rewarded . . . ; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.”¹

The Lord’s instructions to parents

I must begin by testifying that the word of the Lord to parents in this Church is contained in the 68th section of the Doctrine and Covenants in this remarkable instruction:

“And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.”²

Parents are instructed to “teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.”³ As a father, grandfather, and great-grandfather I accept this as the word of the Lord, and as a servant of Jesus Christ I urge parents to follow this counsel as conscientiously as they can.

The measure of good parents

Who are good parents? They are those who have lovingly, prayerfully, and earnestly tried to teach their children by example and precept “to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.”⁴ This is true even though some of their children are disobedient or worldly. Children come into this world with their own distinct spirits and personality traits. Some children “would challenge any set of parents under any set of circumstances. . . . Perhaps there are others who would bless the lives of, and be a joy to, almost any father or mother.”⁵ Successful parents are those who have sacrificed and struggled to do the best they can in their own family circumstances.

The love of parents transcends all

The depth of the love of parents for their children cannot be measured. It is like no other relationship. It exceeds concern for life itself. The love of a parent for a child is continuous and transcends heartbreak and disappointment. All parents hope and pray that their children will make wise decisions. Children who are obedient and responsible bring to their parents unending pride and satisfaction.

But what if the children who have been taught by faithful, loving parents have rebelled or been led astray? Is there hope? The grief of a parent over a rebellious child is almost inconsolable. King David’s third son, Absalom, killed one of his brothers and also led a rebellion against his father. Absalom was killed by Joab. Upon hearing of Absalom’s death, King David wept and expressed his sadness: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”⁶

This paternal love is also expressed in the parable of the prodigal son. When his rebellious son returned home after having squandered his inheritance in riotous living, the father killed the fatted calf and celebrated the return of the prodigal, saying to his obedient, if resentful, son, “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”⁷

Comfort of the sealing power

I believe and accept the comforting statement of Elder Orson F. Whitney:

“The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.”⁸

Repentance of wayward children

A principle in this statement that is often overlooked is that they must fully repent and “suffer for their sins” and “pay their debt to justice.” I recognize that now is the time “to prepare to meet God.”⁹ If the repentance of the wayward children does not happen in this life, is it still possible for the cords of the sealing to be strong enough for them yet to work out their re-

pentance? In the Doctrine and Covenants we are told:

“The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,

“And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation.”¹⁰

We remember that the prodigal son wasted his inheritance, and when it was all gone he came back to his father’s house. There he was welcomed back into the family, but his inheritance was spent.¹¹ Mercy will not rob justice, and the sealing power of faithful parents will claim wayward children only on the condition of their repentance and Christ’s Atonement. Repentant wayward children will enjoy salvation and all the blessings that go with it, but exaltation is much more. It must be fully earned. The question as to who will be exalted must be left to the Lord in His mercy.

There are very few whose rebellion and evil deeds are so great that they have “sinned away the power to repent.”¹² That judgment must also be left up to the Lord. He tells us, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”¹³

Perhaps in this life we are not given to fully understand how enduring the sealing cords of righteous parents are to their children. It may very well be that there are more helpful sources at work than we know.¹⁴ I believe there is a strong familial pull as the influence of beloved ancestors continues with us from the other side of the veil.

President Howard W. Hunter observed that “repentance is but the homesickness of the soul, and the uninterrupted and watchful care of the parent is the fairest earthly type of the unfailing forgiveness of God.” Is not the family the nearest analogy which the Savior’s mission sought to establish?¹⁵

The example of our own parents

We learn much of parenting from our own parents. My love for my father deepened profoundly when he was kind, patient, and understanding. When I damaged the family car, he was gentle and forgiving. But his sons could expect strong discipline if there was any shading of the truth or continued breaking of the rules, particularly showing disrespect for our mother. My father has been gone for almost half a century, but I still sorely miss being able to go to him for wise and loving counsel. I admit I questioned his counsel at times, but I could never question his love for me. I never wanted to disappoint him.

Provide loving, firm discipline

An important element of doing the best we can as parents is to provide loving but firm discipline. If we do not discipline our children, society may do it in a way that is not to our liking or our children's. Part of disciplining children is to teach them to work. President Gordon B. Hinckley has said: "One of the greatest values . . . is the virtue of honest work. Knowledge without labor is profitless. Knowledge with labor is genius."¹⁶

Satan's pervasive snares are increasing, and raising children is becoming harder because of this. Therefore, parents need to do the very best they can and to enlist the help that Church service and activity can provide. If parents misbehave and stray even temporarily, some of their children may be prone to take license from that example.

Turn hearts to parents

Now there is another side to this coin that needs to be mentioned. I make a plea for children who are estranged from their parents to reach out to them, even if they have been less than they should have been.

Children who are critical of their parents might well remember the wise counsel of Moroni when he said, "Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been."¹⁷

When Moroni visited young Joseph Smith in 1823, he quoted the following verse concerning the mission of Elijah: "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers."¹⁸ I hope all children will eventually turn their hearts to their fathers and also to their mothers.

A wonderful couple I knew in my youth had a son who was rebellious and estranged himself from their family. But in their later years, he reconciled with them and was the most caring and solicitous of all their children. As we get older, the pull from our parents and grandparents on the other side of the veil becomes stronger. It is a sweet experience when they visit us in our dreams.

Do not judge parents whose children stray

It is very unfair and unkind to judge conscientious and faithful parents because some of their children rebel or stray from the teachings and love of their parents. Fortunate are the couples who have children and grandchildren who bring them comfort and satisfaction. We should be considerate of those worthy, righteous parents who struggle and suffer with disobedient children.

One of my friends used to say, "If you have never had any problems with your children, just wait awhile." No one can say with any degree of certainty what their children will do under certain cir-

cumstances. When my wise mother-in-law saw other children misbehaving, she used to say, "I never say my children would not do that because they might be out doing it right while I am speaking!" When parents mourn for disobedient and wayward children, we must, with compassion, "forbid the casting of the first stone."¹⁹

An anonymous Church member wrote about the continuous heartache her brother caused her parents. He got involved in drugs. He resisted all efforts at control and discipline. He was deceitful and defiant. Unlike the prodigal, this errant son did not come home of his own accord. Instead he got caught by the police and was forced to face the consequences of his actions. For two years his parents supported Bill's treatment program, which brought about his eventual recovery from drugs. In summary, Bill's sister observed: "I think my parents are extraordinary. They never wavered in their love for Bill, though they disagreed with and even hated what he was doing to himself and to their family life. But they were committed enough to their family to support Bill in any way necessary to get him through the tough times and onto more solid ground. They practiced the deeper, more sensitive, and extensive gospel of Christ by loving one who had gone astray."²⁰

Let us not be arrogant but rather be humbly grateful if our children are obedient and respectful of our teachings of the ways of the Lord.

The Good Shepherd watches over them

To those brokenhearted parents who have been righteous, diligent, and prayerful in the teaching of their disobedient children, we say to you, the Good Shepherd is watching over them. God knows and understands your deep sorrow. There is hope. Take comfort in the words of Jeremiah: "Thy work shall be rewarded," and your children can "come again from the land of

the enemy."²¹ I so testify and pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Jeremiah 31:15–16.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 68:28.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 68:28.
5. Howard W. Hunter, in Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 65.
6. 2 Samuel 18:33.
7. Luke 15:32.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110.
9. Alma 34:32.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 138:58–59.
11. See Luke 15:11–32.
12. Alonzo A. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 1919, 161.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
14. See John K. Carmack, "When Our Children Go Astray," *Ensign*, Feb. 1997, 7–13.
15. See *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 32.
16. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 704.
17. Mormon 9:31.
18. Joseph Smith—History 1:39.
19. Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* (1973), 58.
20. "With Love—from the Prodigal's Sister," *Ensign*, June 1991, 19.
21. Jeremiah 31:16.

President Monson

Thank you, President Faust.

We shall now hear from Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, followed by Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander of the Presidency of the Seventy. The choir and congregation will then sing "How Firm a Foundation."

Following the singing, Sister Susan W. Tanner, Young Women general president, and then Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will speak. The choir will then sing "The Morning Breaks."

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Care for the life of the soul

Within the swirling global events—events from which we are not totally immune—is humanity’s real and continuing struggle: whether or not, amid the cares of the world, we will really choose, in the words of the Lord, to “care . . . for the life of the soul” (D&C 101:37). Whatever our anxious involvements with outward events, this inner struggle proceeds in both tranquil and turbulent times. Whether understood or recognized, this is the unchanging mortal agendum from generation to generation.

When we strive to keep God’s commandments, “the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Then, even on bad days, we will still “[keep our] own soul” regardless of external conditions (Proverbs 19:16). Granted, some inward decisions to care for and “keep” our souls occur in otherwise uneventful times, as with the prodigal son. He had fed the swine day by day, finally experiencing a special day when he “came to himself” (Luke 15:17). Whatever else happened on that particular day in that “far country” (Luke 15:13), the prodigal son had “thought on [his] ways” (Psalm 119:59) and firmly concluded that “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18). Transformation followed introspection. Even so, one home-ward-bound swineherd would scarcely have been noticed by the passersby, though things of eternal significance had happened to him.

At other times, however, the interplay of outward and inward things is more visible. Pilate was dealing with a seemingly local disturbance surrounding one Jesus of Nazareth. His new accord with Herod—with whom Pilate had been “at enmity” (Luke 23:12)—was doubtless political news among those in the know. Though ambivalent, he yielded to a conditioned crowd, amnestying Barabbas instead of Jesus.

With washed but dirty hands, Pilate apparently returned to Caesarea. Christ, however, went on to Gethsemane and Calvary, performing the agonizing but emancipating universal Atonement whereby billions and billions would be resurrected.

God’s work often proceeds quietly

Today, war clouds here and there rain upon the just and the unjust, but Christ’s glorious gift of the great Resurrection will be showered upon us all! Just as the white-caps do not disclose the deep sea changes underway, so in the case of the Atonement, things global and eternal in their significance were happening in a small garden and upon an obscure hill.

The unfolding of God’s work often proceeds quietly. For example, whatever the immediate economic reasons the Joseph Smith Sr. family had for moving from New England to upstate New York, they were being led—unawares—to sacred plates, buried in Cumorah’s Hill, waiting to become another testament of Christ for “as long as the earth shall stand” (2 Nephi 25:22).

Do not rationalize breaking covenants

Therefore, though ours is a time of conflict, quietly caring for “the life of the soul” is still what matters most. Though events set up the defining moments which can evoke profiles in righteousness, outward commotions cannot excuse any failure of inward resolve, even if some seem to unravel so easily. If hostilities break out here and there, we still need not break our covenants! For example, adultery cannot be rationalized merely because there is a war on and some wives and husbands are separated. There is no footnote to the seventh commandment reading “Thou shalt not commit adultery except in times of war” (see Exodus 20:14).

In another time of war, President David O. McKay counseled members in the military to “keep yourselves morally clean” amid “the beastliness of war” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 153).

Even though nations shall rise against nations, such turbulence does not justify business partners rising against their partners or against their stockholders by stealing or bearing false witness, violating both the eighth and ninth commandments—for which there are no excusing footnotes (see Exodus 20:15–16).

Uncertainty as to world conditions does not justify moral uncertainty, and distracting churn will not cover our sins nor dim God’s all-seeing eye. Furthermore, military victories are no substitute for winning our individual wars for self-control. Nor do the raging human hatreds lessen God’s perfect and redeeming love for all His children. Likewise, the obscuring mists of the moment cannot change the reality that Christ is the Light of the World!

Let us, therefore, be like the young man with Elisha on the mount. Though he was at first intimidated by the surrounding enemy chariots, his eyes were mercifully opened and he saw “horses and chariots of fire,” verifying that “they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16, 17). Brothers and sisters, the spiritual arithmetic has not changed!

God will lead us and be with us

Our own intellectual shortfalls and perplexities do not alter the fact of God’s astonishing foreknowledge, which takes into account our choices for which we are responsible. Amid the mortal and fragmentary communiques and the breaking news of the day concerning various human conflicts, God lives in an eternal now where the past, present, and future are constantly before Him (see D&C 130:7). His divine determinations are guaranteed, since whatever He takes in His heart to do, He will surely do it (see Abraham 3:17). He knows the end from the beginning!

(see Abraham 2:8). God is fully “able to do [His] . . . work” (2 Nephi 27:20) and to bring all His purposes to pass, something untrue of the best-laid plans of man since we so often use our agency amiss!

God has assured us:

“I will lead you along” (D&C 78:18).

“I will be in your midst” (D&C 49:27).

He will be with us, brothers and sisters, “in [our] time of trouble” (D&C 3:8), including through the guidance of His living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Be kind and generous even during turmoil

Meanwhile, the defining moments in the “life of the soul” continue to turn on whether we respond with self-indulgence or self-denial in our daily, individual decisions, as between kindness and anger, mercy and injustice, generosity and meanness.

Wars do not repeal the second commandment. It knows no borders. Its adherents wear no national insignia, nor do they have skin of a particular color.

We may experience hunger, for instance, but if so, we can still respond as did the widow who used the last of her meal to feed Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:8–16). Such sharing amid real deprivation and poverty is always touching. Earlier in his life, a wonderful bishop of my youth, M. Thirl Marsh, repeatedly tried to be hired at the mines during the Depression. Being underage but large of stature, he persisted and was hired, but several friends were not. Apparently, on more than one occasion after his hard day’s work, generous young Thirl shared his earnings equally with these friends until they too were hired. No wonder he was such a caring shepherd of the flock later on.

Strive for full conversion

When pondering “the life of the soul,” it helps to strive for our own full conversion whereas the gospel seed first falls on

“good ground”—which is defined by Jesus as those with an “honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). Sequentially, such an individual “heareth the word” with “joy,” “understandeth it,” “beareth fruit,” “endureth,” and finally learns what it is to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 13:20, 23; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 13:21; Matthew 5:6). It is “a mighty change” (Mosiah 5:2). Conversion basically represents the transformation from the “natural man” to becoming the “man of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19; Helaman 3:29; see also 2 Corinthians 5:17). It is a labor which takes more than an afternoon.

The outcomes of this ongoing process include having “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). No wonder, therefore, this process enables those so converted to “strengthen [their] brethren” (Luke 22:32) and so lift others by being “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Such righteous individuals perform another vital but quiet service to mankind:

they become part of the critical mass that can evoke God’s much-needed blessings on all humanity.

Care for the soul in all circumstances

Truly converted disciples, though still imperfect, will pursue “the life of the soul” on any day, in any decade, amid any decadence and destruction. This process constitutes being about our “Father’s business” (Luke 2:49; see also Moses 1:39).

Since this full conversion is what is supposed to be happening anyway, stern events and turbulence may actually even help us by causing a resumption of the journey or an acceleration.

Brothers and sisters, amid the volatile and vexing cares of the world, let us, as instructed, care for the “life of the soul.” Thanks to Jesus’ glorious Atonement, the life of that immortal soul outlasts the stretching longevity of any star and hence the short span of passing mortal events, even if grim!

I so testify, in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen!

Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander

Places of spiritual refuge

In answer to Pilate’s question “Art thou the King of the Jews?” the Savior answered, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:33, 36). With these few words, Jesus declares His kingdom independent and distinct from this world. The Savior’s teachings, doctrine, and personal example lift all who truly believe in Him to a divine standard that requires both eye and mind be single to the glory of God (see D&C 4:5; 88:68). The glory of God encompasses all that is holy and sacred. Our ability to seek, recognize, and reverence the holy above the profane, and the sacred above the secular, defines our spirituality. Indeed,

without the holy and sacred, we are left with only the profane and secular.

Amidst the bustle of the secular world, with its certain uncertainty, there must be places that offer spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace. There are indeed such places. They are both holy and sacred. They are places where we meet the divine and find the Spirit of the Lord.

Stand in holy places

Three times in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord counsels His people to “stand in holy places” (see D&C 45:32; 87:8; 101:22). The context of His counsel is all the more significant as we look at the

current condition of our world. Desolating disease, persecution, and war have an all-too-familiar face and have imposed themselves into our daily experience. In the face of such perplexing problems, the Lord counsels, “Behold, it is my will, that all they who call on my name, and worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together, and stand in holy places” (D&C 101:22).

Holy places have always been essential to the proper worship of God. For Latter-day Saints, such holy places include venues of historic significance, our homes, sacrament meetings, and temples. Much of what we reverence, and what we teach our children to reverence as holy and sacred, is reflected in these places. The faith and reverence associated with them and the respect we have for what transpires or has transpired in them make them holy. The importance of holy places and sacred space in our worship can hardly be overestimated.

Sacrifice is what makes places sacred

Great personal preparation is required for us to receive the spiritual benefit of standing in holy places. Holy places and sacred space are also distinguished by the *sacrifice* they require. Elder M. Russell Ballard has taught that “the word *sacrifice* means literally ‘to make sacred,’ or ‘to render sacred’” (“The Law of Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1998, 8). The words *sacred* and *sacrifice* come from the same root. One may not have the sacred without first sacrificing something for it. There can be no sacredness without personal sacrifice. Sacrifice sanctifies the sacred.

Sacrifice makes the grove sacred

To many, the grove near the Smith farm in upstate New York is simply beautiful and peaceful. To Latter-day Saints

across the world, however, it is sacred because of the faith and reverence we bring to it and the depth of sacrifice it represents.

Some months ago on a beautiful late fall day, my wife and I sat in that grove. It was indeed beautiful, and we did enjoy the solitary peace we found there. However, it was significantly more than that, for we sat in the immediate vicinity where God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to the young Prophet Joseph Smith. Our faith in, and our reverence for, their visit and the personal sacrifice that ensued because of it, both in the Prophet’s life as well as in the lives of our own ancestors, transformed this beautiful spot into sacred space and a holy place.

Similar deep and reverent feelings are aroused by other sacred places across the earth relating to the history and establishment of this Church. These sacred places inspire our faith and give us encouragement to be true to that faith and to move forward despite the challenges that may cross our path.

Sacrifice makes our homes sacred

Our homes, likewise, are holy places filled with sacred space. Though not always tranquil, our homes can be filled with the Spirit of the Lord. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles teach in “*The Family: A Proclamation to the World*”:

“Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

Such a home does require personal sacrifice. To the Prophet Joseph Smith the

Lord said, “Your family must needs repent and forsake some things” (D&C 93:48). Each of our families is confronted with a broad menu of activities and entertainment, not all of which is wholesome and good—and much of which is certainly not necessary. Like the Prophet’s family, do our families also need to repent and forsake some things to help us maintain the sacred nature of our homes? The establishment of our homes as holy places reflects the depth of sacrifice we are willing to make for them.

Sacrifice makes sacrament meetings sacred

Sacrament meetings are really more than just meetings. They are sacred moments in a holy place. During these weekly moments, we reflect on the most merciful act of sacrifice this world has ever known. We ponder the love of God, who gave His Only Begotten Son that we might obtain eternal life. As we partake of the sacrament, we remember Him and express our willingness to take His name upon us and to keep His commandments. Careful personal preparation, including our own sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit, is prerequisite to the regular spiritual renewal offered through worthy participation. We must be willing and capable of slipping away from the world for just a few moments in order to reflect on holier things. Without this spiritual renewal, our faith is easily overcome by the secular and profane.

Many years ago when our boys were still very young, I made a remark at dinner regarding the excellence of our sacrament meeting and how much I had learned. Their response was a look that told me that they were not sure that we had even been in the same meeting. The difference between my experience and theirs was

simply one of a little maturity and personal preparation. The spiritual renewal we receive from our sacrament meetings will not exceed our preparation and our willingness and desire to be taught.

Sacrifice makes temples sacred

The temples, with “Holiness to the Lord” inscribed on them, are among the most sacred of all places on the earth. They stand as evidence of God’s love to all His children, past and present. The blessings of the temple are intertwined and inseparable from significant sacrifice. The ordinances performed therein provide access to the full expression of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. This alone would qualify the temple as holy and sacred. However, personal sacrifice is also required. We sacrifice time in searching for our ancestors and time to attend to our temple responsibilities. We also strive to live the highest standards of personal worthiness, which qualify us to enter the sacred space of this most holy place.

Revere and respect the holy and sacred

In holy places and in sacred space we find spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace. Are these not worth every necessary personal sacrifice? My brethren and sisters, may each of us revere and respect the holy and sacred in our lives. May we teach our children likewise. Let us all stand in holy and sacred places of spiritual peace.

I express my testimony of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the very Prince of Peace and Hope, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir and congregation sang
“How Firm a Foundation.”

Sister Susan W. Tanner

Did I tell you?

Almost three years ago, one of our daughters got married and immediately left with her husband for medical school in a distant city. She was leaving the security of the nest to begin a family of her own. I wondered, “Did I teach her everything she needs to know? Does she know what is most important in this life? Is she prepared to build a happy home?”

As I watched her drive away, I remembered a little journal I gave her on her 17th birthday. It was entitled “Did I Tell You . . . ?” In it I recorded counsel I had often given her in our late-night conversations. As she and her new husband headed for their life together, I thought of three additional entries I wanted to add to that little journal to help her make a transition more important and challenging than that of crossing the country—the transition to starting her own home and family. Let me share these entries to her and to all young people in the Church, to teach and testify of the importance of family.

Making home a place of peace, strength

First, did I tell you . . . how to make your home a haven of peace and a fortress of strength? You should follow the pattern you witnessed as you entered the Lord’s house, to “establish a house . . . of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, . . . a house of order” (D&C 109:8). As we follow this pattern, great peace will dwell within our homes in a world of increasing turmoil.

Look to the example of your grandparents’ homes. Both sets of grandparents brought up their “children in light and truth” (D&C 93:40). Dad’s home was a house of learning. He said at his father’s funeral that he had never learned a gospel principle at a Church meeting that he hadn’t already learned in his own home.

The Church was a supplement to his home. My home was a house of order. It was of utmost importance (in spite of many hectic schedules) for us to be together for breakfast and dinner. Mealtimes meant more than just refueling. It was a crucial time for nourishing spirits as well as bodies.

Small things make a happy home—things like praying, saying “I’m sorry,” expressing gratitude, reading a good book together. Remember how we laughed and cried as we built the backyard fence? Remember how every time we drove in the car we sang so we wouldn’t quarrel? Remember how we fasted for one member’s important decision and for another’s crucial test? The family proclamation reiterates this:

“Successful . . . families are established . . . on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome . . . activities” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

In your youth, you formed habits of praying and reading scriptures. Capitalize on those habits as well as the skills you learned of cooking and budgeting. With your righteous desires and your homemaking abilities, you will build a home that is a haven of peace and a fortress of strength.

The joy of being a parent

Next, did I tell you . . . that “children are an heritage of the Lord”? (Psalm 127:3). The family proclamation declares, “God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). We hope Heavenly Father will bless you with children. Many in the world miss the joy and see children only as an inconvenience. It is true that parenting is physically exhausting, emotionally draining, and mentally demanding. No one will give you good grades or blue ribbons for what you

do as a mother. Sometimes you might wonder, "Did I do this right? Is it all worth it?"

It is worth it! All latter-day prophets have borne witness to the sacred role of motherhood. President Spencer W. Kimball said, "It is important for you Latter-day Saint women to understand that the Lord holds motherhood and mothers sacred and in the highest esteem" ("Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 105). The Spirit testifies to my soul that this is true.

You will come to know, as I do, that parenting is not only challenging, but it provides life's greatest joys. Joy comes when at family home evening a five-year-old tells a scripture story with complete and correct details or when a child reads the Book of Mormon faithfully every night. I feel joy when my cheerleader has the courage to tell her squad that the new cheer they are learning has inappropriate actions in it, and when a missionary daughter writes of her testimony of the gospel. Joy comes as I watch a daughter read to a blind woman and a son serve in the temple. In these moments I feel as John the Beloved: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1:4). Did I tell you . . . that to the very depths of my being, I love being a mother?

Love and encourage children

Finally, did I tell you . . . that love is the foundational virtue in building a strong home? Our Father in Heaven exemplifies the pattern we should follow. He loves us, teaches us, is patient with us, and entrusts us with our agency. President Hinckley said:

"Love can make the difference—love generously given in childhood and reaching through the awkward years of youth . . . and encouragement that is quick to compliment and slow to criticize" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 79–80; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 60).

Sometimes discipline, which means "to teach," is confused with criticism. Chil-

dren, as well as people of all ages, improve behavior from love and encouragement more than from faultfinding.

When a young man I know had a long hippie hairstyle during his teens, his parents chose to concentrate instead on his good work ethic and his kindness to needy people. Eventually he himself chose to cut his hair. He went on to get a good education, serve in the Church, and follow in his own family this pattern of loving children into doing what is right.

We demonstrate our love for family members not only in teaching them affirmatively but also in giving them of our time. Some time ago I read an article called "Putting Children Last," which told about parents who talk about their children in "appointment book" terms: 15 minutes at night when possible, regularly scheduled play time once a week, and so on (see Mary Eberstadt, *Wall Street Journal*, 2 May 1995). Contrast that with the mother who vowed to give her children not just quality time but quantity time. She recognized that a loving relationship requires constant and ongoing talking, playing, laughing, and working moments. I too believe that parents and children need to participate in each other's everyday, ordinary experiences. So I know about your upcoming test; you know about my lesson preparation. I attend your games; you join me in the kitchen for dinner preparation. We are major players in each other's lives, absorbing love through daily experiences.

And love endures through the hardships of life. The Apostle Paul taught: "Charity suffereth long. . . [It] beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7, 8). I watched a mother's enduring love for her alcoholic son. She never gave up praying for him and being available for him. In his later years, he finally "came to himself" (Luke 15:17), kept a respectable job, and used his mechanical skills to fix up his mother's house.

Many families struggle with wayward children. We can take comfort in “the eternal sealings of faithful parents” which will draw children “back to the fold” (Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110). We must never give up loving them, praying for them, and trusting in our Heavenly Father’s care.

So to my daughter, and to all young people in the Church, as you make the transition to this new phase in your life,

I tell you these things. I testify that in the eternal scheme of things, the most crucial and fulfilling thing you will do is to build a holy home and rear a strong family in love. This family unit will bless society and endure through eternity. I so testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Come, Rejoice.”

Elder Richard G. Scott

The sustaining power of faith

Who does not have need of assurance in times of uncertainty and testing? Who is so self-confident that there is never want for a stabilizing influence in life? A fundamental purpose of earth life is personal growth and attainment. Consequently, there must be times of trial and quandary to provide opportunity for that development. What child could ever grow to be self-supporting in maturity if all the critical decisions were made by parents? So it is with our Heavenly Father. His plan of happiness is conceived so that we will have challenges, even difficulties, where decisions of great importance must be made so that we can grow, develop, and succeed in this mortal probation.¹ Gratefully, in His perfect love, He has provided a way for us to resolve those challenges while growing in strength and capacity. I speak of the sustaining power of faith in times of uncertainty and testing.

God has given us the capacity to exercise faith so we may find peace, joy, and purpose in life. However, if we are to employ its power, faith must be founded on something. There is no more solid foundation than faith in the love Heavenly Father has for you, faith in His plan of happiness, and faith in the capacity and willingness of Jesus Christ to fulfill all of His promises.

Comparison with nuclear particles

For some, faith is not understood and consequently not used to full advantage. Some feel that any discussion of religion and the guidance one can receive through robust faith have no rational basis. However, faith is not illusion nor magic but a power rooted in eternal principles. Are you one who has tried to exercise faith and has felt no benefit? If so, you likely have not understood and followed the principles upon which faith is founded. An example will illustrate what I mean.

Years ago I participated in the measurement of the nuclear characteristics of different materials. The process used an experimental nuclear reactor designed so that high-energy particles streamed from a hole in the center of the reactor. These particles were directed into an experimental chamber where measurements were made. The high-energy particles could not be seen, but they had to be carefully controlled to avoid harm to others.

One day a janitor entered while we were experimenting. In a spirit of disgust he said, “You are all liars, pretending that you are doing something important, but you can’t fool me. I know that if you can’t see, hear, taste, smell, or touch something, it doesn’t exist.” That attitude ruled out the possibility of his learning that there is

much of worth that can't be identified by the five senses. Had that man been willing to open his mind to understand how the presence of nuclear particles is detected, he would have confirmed their existence. In like manner, never doubt the reality of faith.

Principles for exercising faith

You will gather the fruits of faith as you follow the principles God has established for its use. Some of those principles are:

- Trust in God and in His willingness to provide help when needed no matter how challenging the circumstance.
- Obey His commandments and live to demonstrate that He can trust you.
- Be sensitive to the quiet prompting of the Spirit.
- Act courageously on that prompting.
- Be patient and understanding when God lets you struggle to grow and when answers come a piece at a time over an extended period.

Motivating faith is centered in trust in the Lord and in His willingness to answer your needs. For “the Lord . . . doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.”² The consistent, willing exercise of faith increases your confidence and ability to employ the power of faith.

Pattern for strengthening faith

You can learn to use faith more effectively by applying this principle taught by Moroni: “Faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the *trial of your faith*.³” Thus, every time you *try your faith*—that is, act in worthiness on an impression—you will receive the confirming evidence of the Spirit. Those feelings will fortify your faith. As you repeat that pattern, your faith will become stronger.

The Lord knows your needs. When you ask with honesty and real intent, He

will prompt you to do that which will increase your ability to act in faith. With consistent practice, faith will become a vibrant, powerful, uplifting, inspiring force in your life. As you walk to the boundary of your understanding into the twilight of uncertainty, exercising faith, you will be led to find solutions you would not obtain otherwise. I testify that I know that is true.

Faith is accepting of God's will

Even if you exercise your strongest faith, God will not always reward you immediately according to your desires. Rather, God will respond with what in His eternal plan is best for you. He loves you to a depth and completeness you cannot conceive of in your mortal state. Indeed, were you to know His entire plan, you would never ask for that which is contrary to it even though your feelings tempt you to do so. Sincere faith gives us understanding and strength to accept the will of our Heavenly Father when it differs from our own. We can accept His will with peace and assurance, confident that His infinite wisdom surpasses our own ability to comprehend fully His plan as it unfolds a piece at a time.

Faith is not just push a button and you get the answer. The Lord declared, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”⁴ Brigham Young observed, “God never bestows upon his people, or upon an individual, superior blessings without a severe trial to prove them.”⁵ Personally, for some vital decisions I have experienced the grueling, anguishing struggle that precedes a confirming answer. Yet those trying experiences have been edifying. It is comforting to know that God will never try you more than you can manage with His help.

Faith forges strength of character

God uses your faith to mold your character. Character is the manifestation of what you are becoming. Strong moral

character results from consistent correct choices in the trials and testing of life. Your faith can guide you to those correct choices. Clearly, it is what you do and what you think about that determine what you are and what you will become. Therefore, the choices you make need to be inspired by the Lord. Others can encourage you to make the right decisions, but those choices must not be prescribed by them. You need to ponder, pray, and exercise faith to willingly make choices consistent with the teachings of the Master. Such choices are made with trust in things that are believed and when acted upon will be confirmed. Only enough guidance is given to lead you aright and not to weaken your growing character. That guidance will solidify your trust in Heavenly Father and the Savior.

Faith will forge strength of character available to you in times of urgent need. Such character is not developed in moments of great challenge or temptation. That is when it is used. Character is woven patiently from threads of principle, doctrine, and obedience. In James we read: "The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."⁶

Character expands capacity for faith

The bedrock of character is integrity. Worthy character will strengthen your capacity to respond obediently to the direction of the Spirit. Righteous character is what you are becoming. It is more important than what you own, what you have learned, or what goals you have accomplished. It allows you to be trusted. Righteous character provides the foundation of spiritual strength. It enables you in times of trial and testing to make difficult, extremely important decisions correctly even when they seem overpowering. I testify that neither Satan nor any other power can weaken or destroy your growing char-

acter. Only you could do that through disobedience.

Our Father's plan is marvelous. Your exercise of faith builds character. Fortified character expands your capacity to exercise faith. Thus, your confidence in conquering the trials of life is enhanced. And the strengthening cycle continues. The more your character is fortified, the more enabled you are to exercise the power of faith.

The axiom "You get what you pay for" is true for spiritual rewards as well. You get what you pay for in obedience, in faith in Jesus Christ, in diligent application of the truths that you learn. What you get is the molding of your character, with growth in capacity, and the successful completion of your purpose here on earth—to grow through being proven.

God's perfect love is our source of peace

No matter what occurs, no matter how topsy-turvy the world becomes, you can always have the sustaining power of faith. That will never change. The perfect love of your Father in Heaven will never change. His gospel plan gives life meaning and can ensure your happiness. His plan is not only to prove you here on earth but also that you may receive the growth that comes from correct decisions prompted by faith, enabled by your obedience.

Why worry about future calamities or uncertainties over which you have no control? Your righteous character magnifies the probability that you will never have to suffer them. When challenges and testing do come, your faith will lead you to solutions. Your peace of mind, your assurance of answers to vexing problems, your ultimate joy depend upon your trust in Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Right will ultimately prevail. It will yield blessings now as you in faith obey the commandments of God.

Remember, an unfailing, continual, ever-present source of peace and comfort

is available to you. It is the certainty that your Father in Heaven loves you no matter what your circumstance, no matter what winds of trial, turmoil, or tribulation whirl about you. That certainty will never change. Your ability to access that support depends on the strength of your faith in Him and in His certain willingness to bless you.

I testify that faith in God and in His guidance through the Holy Spirit will sustain you in an increasingly more challenging world. I testify that the application of the principles we have reviewed will help you avail yourself of the sustaining power of faith in times of uncertainty and testing.

There are many around you who are confused and are seeking solutions to life's perplexing problems. Share your testimony of truth and the power of faith with them. Help them understand how faith in God and in His teachings, restored in their fulness in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, can bless their lives now, in these turbulent times. Testify of the power of the Lord to bless their lives. Do it now. The Lord will help you. Your faith will guide you and sustain you. I know it will. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Revelation 3:19.
2. Helaman 12:1; see also Proverbs 3:5–6.
3. Ether 12:6; italics added.
4. Revelation 3:19.
5. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 338.
6. James 1:3–4.

The choir sang “The Morning Breaks.”

President Monson

As you leave the conference, we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

We express our appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved president and prophet, will now speak to us. Following his remarks, the session will conclude with the choir singing “He Watching over Israel.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Dale E. Miller of the Seventy. The concluding session of this conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

War and peace

My brethren and sisters, last Sunday as I sat in my study thinking of what I might say on this occasion, I received a phone call telling me that Staff Sergeant James W. Cawley of the U.S. Marines had been killed somewhere in Iraq. He was 41 years of age, leaving behind a wife and two small children.

Twenty years ago Elder Cawley was a missionary of the Church in Japan. Like so many others, he had grown up in the Church, had played as a schoolboy, had

passed the sacrament as a deacon, and had been found worthy to serve a mission to teach the gospel of peace to the people of Japan. He returned home, served in the Marines, married, became a policeman, and was then recalled to active military duty, to which he responded without hesitation.

His life, his mission, his military service, his death seem to represent the contradictions of the peace of the gospel and the tides of war.

And so I venture to say something about the war and the gospel we teach.

I spoke of this somewhat in our October conference of 2001. When I came to this pulpit at that time, the war against terrorism had just begun. The present war is really an outgrowth and continuation of that conflict. Hopefully it is now drawing to a conclusion.

As I discuss the matter, I seek the direction of the Holy Spirit. I have prayed and pondered much concerning this. I recognize it is a very sensitive subject for an international congregation, including those not of our religious faith.

The nations of the earth have been divided over the present situation. Feelings have run strong. There have been demonstrations for and against. We are now a world Church with members in most of the nations which have argued this matter. Our people have had feelings. They have had concerns.

Conflict throughout the ages

War, of course, is not new. The weapons change. The ability to kill and destroy is constantly refined. But there has been conflict throughout the ages over essentially the same issues.

The book of Revelation speaks briefly of what must have been a terrible conflict for the minds and loyalties of God's children. The account is worth repeating:

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

"And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7–9).

Isaiah speaks further concerning that great conflict (see Isaiah 14:12–20). Modern revelation gives additional light (see D&C 76:25–29), as does the book of Moses

(see Moses 4:1–4), which tells of Satan's plan to destroy the agency of man.

We sometimes are prone to glorify the great empires of the past, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Roman and Byzantine Empires, and in more recent times, the vast British Empire. But there is a darker side to every one of them. There is a grim and tragic overlay of brutal conquest, of subjugation, of repression, and an astronomical cost in life and treasure.

The great English essayist Thomas Carlyle once ironically shared the observation, "God must needs laugh outright, could such a thing be, to see his wondrous mannikins here below" (quoted in *Sartor Resartus* [1836], 182). I think our Father in Heaven must have wept as He has looked down upon His children through the centuries as they have squandered their divine birthright in ruthlessly destroying one another.

In the course of history, tyrants have arisen from time to time who have oppressed their own people and threatened the world. Such is adjudged to be the case presently, and consequently great and terrifying forces with sophisticated and fearsome armaments have been engaged in battle.

Tears and fears, courage and casualties

Many of our own Church members have been involved in this conflict. We have seen on television and in the press tearful children clinging to their fathers in uniform, going to the battlefield.

In a touching letter I received just this week, a mother wrote of her Marine son who is serving for the second time in a Middle Eastern war. She says that at the time of his first deployment, "he came home on leave and asked me to go for a walk. . . . He had his arm around me and he told me about going to war. He . . . said, 'Mom, I have to go so you and the family can be free, free to worship as you please. . . . And if it costs me my life, . . . then

giving my life is worth it.’” He is now there again and has written to his family recently, saying, “I am proud to be here serving my nation and our way of life. . . . I feel a lot safer knowing our Heavenly Father is with me.”

There are other mothers, innocent civilians, who cling to their children with fear and look heavenward with desperate pleadings as the earth shakes beneath their feet and deadly rockets scream through the dark sky.

There have been casualties in this terrible conflict, and there likely will be more. Public protests will likely continue. Leaders of other nations have, in no uncertain terms, condemned the coalition strategy.

Where does the Church stand?

The question arises, “Where does the Church stand in all of this?”

First, let it be understood that we have no quarrel with the Muslim people or with those of any other faith. We recognize and teach that all the people of the earth are of the family of God. And as He is our Father, so are we brothers and sisters with family obligations one to another.

Subject to laws and governments

But as citizens we are all under the direction of our respective national leaders. They have access to greater political and military intelligence than do the people generally. Those in the armed services are under obligation to their respective governments to execute the will of the sovereign. When they joined the military service, they entered into a contract by which they are presently bound and to which they have dutifully responded.

One of our Articles of Faith, which represent an expression of our doctrine, states, “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (Articles of Faith 1:12).

In defense of family and liberty

But modern revelation states that we are to “renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16). In a democracy we can renounce war and proclaim peace. There is opportunity for dissent. Many have been speaking out and doing so emphatically. That is their privilege. That is their right, so long as they do so legally. However, we all must also be mindful of another overriding responsibility, which I may add, governs my personal feelings and dictates my personal loyalties in the present situation.

When war raged between the Nephites and the Lamanites, the record states that “the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for . . . power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

“And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God” (Alma 43:45–46).

The Lord counseled them, “Defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:47).

And Moroni “rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

“And he fastened on his headplate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren” (Alma 46:12–13).

It is clear from these and other writings that there are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty,

and against tyranny, threat, and oppression.

People who love peace and freedom

When all is said and done, we of this Church are people of peace. We are followers of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the Prince of Peace. But even He said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

This places us in the position of those who long for peace, who teach peace, who work for peace, but who also are citizens of nations and are subject to the laws of our governments. Furthermore, we are a freedom-loving people, committed to the defense of liberty wherever it is in jeopardy. I believe that God will not hold men and women in uniform responsible as agents of their government in carrying forward that which they are legally obligated to do. It may even be that He will hold us responsible if we try to impede or hedge up the way of those who are involved in a contest with forces of evil and repression.

What we can do

Do not let differing opinions lead to ill will

Now, there is much that we can and must do in these perilous times. We can give our opinions on the merits of the situation as we see it, but never let us become a party to words or works of evil concerning our brothers and sisters in various nations on one side or the other. Political differences never justify hatred or ill will. I hope that the Lord's people may be at peace one with another during times of trouble, regardless of what loyalties they may have to different governments or parties.

Pray for those who bear arms

Let us pray for those who are called upon to bear arms by their respective gov-

ernments and plead for the protection of heaven upon them that they may return to their loved ones in safety.

To our brothers and sisters in harm's way, we say that we pray for you. We pray that the Lord will watch over you and preserve you from injury and that you may return home and pick up your lives again. We know that you are not in that land of blowing sand and brutal heat because you enjoy the games of war. The strength of your commitment is measured by your willingness to give your very lives for that in which you believe.

Comfort those who have lost loved ones

We know that some have died, and others may yet die in this hot and deadly contest. We can do all in our power to comfort and bless those who lose loved ones. May those who mourn be comforted with that comfort which comes alone from Christ, the Redeemer. It was He who said to His beloved disciples:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, . . . that where I am, there ye may be also. . . .

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:1–3, 27).

Hope and pray for peace

We call upon the Lord, whose strength is mighty and whose powers are infinite, to bring an end to the conflict, an end that will result in a better life for all concerned. The Lord has declared, "For I, the Lord, rule in the heavens above, and among the armies of the earth" (D&C 60:4).

We can hope and pray for that glorious day foretold by the prophet Isaiah when men "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into prun-

inghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

Live righteously and proclaim salvation

Even in an evil world we can so live our lives as to merit the protecting care of our Father in Heaven. We can be as the righteous living among the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham pleaded that these cities might be spared for the sake of the righteous. (See Genesis 18:20–32.)

And, above all, we can cultivate in our own hearts, and proclaim to the world, the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through His atoning sacrifice we are certain life will continue beyond the veil of death. We can teach that gospel which will lead to the exaltation of the obedient.

Comfort and peace of the Redeemer

Even when the armaments of war ring out in deathly serenade and darkness and hatred reign in the hearts of some, there stands immovable, reassuring, comforting, and with great outreaching love the quiet figure of the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. We can proclaim with Paul:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,

ties, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).

This life is but a chapter in the eternal plan of our Father. It is full of conflict and seeming incongruities. Some die young. Some live to old age. We cannot explain it. But we accept it with the certain knowledge that through the atoning sacrifice of our Lord we shall all go on living, and this with the comforting assurance of His immeasurable love.

He has said, "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23).

And there, my brothers and sisters, we rest our faith. Regardless of the circumstances, we have the comfort and peace of Christ our Savior, our Redeemer, the living Son of the living God. I so testify in His holy name, even the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "He Watching over Israel."

Elder Dale E. Miller offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 173rd Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 6, 2003. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe were the organists.

President Faust made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President James E. Faust

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating

in these proceedings by radio, television, cable, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing "They, the Builders of the Nation." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Charles Didier of the Presidency of the Seventy, following which the choir will sing "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will then address us. He will be followed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, also of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Elder Spencer E. Jones of the Seventy.

The choir sang "They, the Builders of the Nation."

Elder Charles Didier offered the invocation.

The choir sang "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

President Boyd K. Packer

What grandparents do

Years ago on Christmas Eve, a cousin lost a little five-year-old boy to quick-pneumonia. The family gathered around the casket for the family prayer. A small blanket, made by his mother, lay folded across the little boy's feet.

Just as they were to close the casket, my mother stepped forward, put her arm around the grieving mother, and helped her unfold the blanket and tuck it around the little boy. The last his parents saw of their little son, he was asleep, covered with that favorite blanket. It was a very tender moment. That is what grandmothers do!

We returned to Brigham City for the funeral of my wife's father, William W. Smith. A young man I knew as a seminary student stood at the casket, deeply moved. I did not know that he knew my father-in-law. He said:

"One summer I worked for him on the farm. Brother Smith talked to me about going on a mission. My family could not possibly support a missionary. Brother Smith told me to pray about it and said, 'If you decide to go on a mission, I will pay for your mission,' and he did."

Neither my wife nor her mother knew that. It was one of those things that grandfathers do.

We have 10 children. One unsettled Sunday morning when our family was young, my wife was in sacrament meeting. As usual, I was away on Sunday. Our children took up much of a row.

Sister Walker, a lovely, gray-haired grandmother who raised 12 children, quietly moved from several rows back and slid into the row among our restless children. After the meeting, my wife thanked her for the help.

Sister Walker said, "You have your hands full, don't you?" My wife nodded. Sister Walker then patted her on the hand and said, "Your hands full now; your heart full later!" How prophetic was her quiet comment. That is what grandmothers do!

We presided over the New England Mission. One of our missionaries married and had five children. He went away to get a larger car for his family and never returned. His body was later found under an overpass; his car had been stolen.

I called his stake president to offer help to the family. He had already offered.

The grandfather said, "We know what our duty is. We won't need any help from the Church. We know what our duty is." That is what grandfathers do!

The elderly—a priceless resource

It is my purpose to speak to you about and to speak to grandparents—the grandpas and the grandmas—and to other elderly members who have no children of their own but who stand in as grandparents.

The scriptures tell us, "With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding" (Job 12:12).

Once in a stake meeting, I noticed a larger than usual number of older members, most of them widows. I mentioned to the stake president how impressive they were.

The president replied, "Yes, but they are not active in the Church," meaning they did not serve as leaders or teachers. He spoke as though they were a burden.

I repeated his words, "Not active in the Church?" and asked, "Are they active in the gospel?" He did not quite understand the difference at first.

Like many of us, he concentrated so much on what people *do* that he overlooked what they *are*—a priceless resource of experience, wisdom, and inspiration.

Youth should draw close to the elderly

We face an ominous challenge. Populations worldwide are declining. The birth-rate in most countries is falling and life expectancy increasing. Families are smaller—deliberately limited. In some countries, in just a few years there will be more grandparents than there are children. The aging of the population has far-reaching consequences economically, socially, and spiritually. It will affect the growth of the Church.

We must teach our youth to draw close to the elderly grandpas and grandmas.

The First Presidency recently instructed young women who are approaching womanhood to join the mothers and grandmothers in Relief Society (see First Presidency letter, 19 Mar. 2003).

Some young women draw away. They would rather be with those their own age.

Young women, do not be so very foolish as to miss this association with the older sisters. They will bring more worth into your life than much of the activity you enjoy so much.

Leaders, teach the girls to draw close to their mothers and grandmothers and to the older women in the Relief Society. They will then have an association similar to what the young men have in the priesthood quorums.

The Restoration ties generations together

All the attention given to our youth—all the programs, all we do for them—will be incomplete unless we teach them the purpose of the Restoration. The keys of the priesthood were restored and the sealing authority revealed and temples built to tie the generations together. From ancient times through all the revelations runs that eternal, golden thread, "Turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

Use the resource of the elderly

Bishop, do you realize that some problems you worry about so much with the youth, and with others, could be solved if they would stay close to their fathers and mothers and to their grandparents, to the older folks?

If you are burdened with overmuch counseling, there are older sisters, grandmas in the ward, who can influence young married women and act as a grandmother to them. And there are older grandfathers for the young men. Older people have a

steadiness, a serenity that comes from experience. Learn to use that resource.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "The way to get along in any important matter is to gather unto yourselves wise men [and women], experienced and aged men [and women], to assist in council in all times of trouble" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 299).

We try to gather young people, and we miss getting the generations together. There is so much that older members can do. If you see older members as inactive in the Church, ask yourself, "Are they active in the gospel?"

Prayers of parents and grandparents

Do not overlook the great sustaining power in the prayers of the parents and the grandparents. Remember, the "fervent prayer of a righteous man [or woman] availeth much" (James 5:16).

Alma the Younger was a rebel. He was struck down by an angel who told him, "Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith" (Mosiah 27:14).

Blessings of caring for the elderly

My wife and I have seen our grandparents and then our parents leave us. Some experiences that we first thought to be burdens or trouble have long since been reclassified as blessings.

My wife's father died in our home. He needed constant care. Nurses taught our children how to care for our bedridden grandpa. What they learned is of great

worth to them and to us. How grateful we are to have had him close to us.

We were repaid a thousand times over by the influence he had on our children. That was a great experience for our children, one I learned as a boy when Grandpa Packer died in our home.

Value the old folks for what they *are*, not just what they *can do*.

Pattern in the Church's presiding councils

Have you ever wondered why the Lord organized the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles so the senior leadership of the Church will always be older men? This pattern of seniority values wisdom and experience over youth and physical vigor.

The average age of the Presidency and the Twelve at the present time is 77 years old. We are not very nimble. We may be past our prime. Nevertheless, the Lord ordered it to be this way.

A conference or two ago, Joseph Wirthlin said he was going to challenge the members of the Twelve to a race. I thought once, "Well, I'll accept the challenge." Then I thought it would be safer to race against 96-year-old Brother David Haight. I thought that over and decided that David might trip me with his cane, and I would lose the race. So I gave it up!

When the Presidency and the Twelve meet together, we combine 1,161 years of life with an astonishing variety of experiences. We have 430 years, cumulatively, as General Authorities of the Church. Almost anything we talk about, one or more of us has been there, done that—including military action!

Seek help and advice from the elderly

We live in troubled times. In the lifetime of our youth, the troubles will never be less and will certainly be more. Old folks offer a sure knowledge that things can be endured.

Our children have married and left home to seek their fortune. One family drove away with an old car and their little children. My wife was in tears. I consoled her, saying, "The Church is where they are going. There will be a grandma there to answer her questions about cooking or nursing and a grandpa to teach him practical things."

An adopted grandma can be found in Relief Society. And a grandpa will be found in the quorums of the priesthood. But not all of the grandpas and grandmas are in the Church.

One son bought a small home in a distant state. He showed me bricks on a corner of the foundation that were eroding away. He asked what he should do.

I did not know, but I asked, "Is there an older couple that lives close to you?"

"Yes," he said, "across the street and down a few houses is a retired couple."

"Why don't you ask him to come over and look at that. He knows your climate."

That was done, and he got the advice of an older man who had seen problems like that and many others. That is what *adopted* grandpas can do.

"Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12).

The Apostle Paul taught that "aged women" must teach young women and "aged men" must exhort young men, "shewing thyself a pattern of good works" (see Titus 2:1-7).

Do not withdraw during the golden years

We are old now, and in due time we will be summoned beyond the veil. We do not resist that. We try to teach the practical things we have learned over the years to those who are younger—to our family and to others.

We cannot *do* what we once did, but we have become more than ever we were

before. Life's lessons, some of them very painful, qualify us to counsel, to correct, and even to warn our youth.

In your golden years there is so much to *do* and so much to *be*. Do not withdraw into a retirement from life, into amusement. That, for some, would be useless, even selfish. You may have served a mission and been released and consider yourself as having completed your service in the Church, but you are never released from being active in the *gospel*. "If," the Lord said, "ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work" (D&C 4:3).

You may at last, when old and feeble, learn that the greatest mission of all is to strengthen your own family and the families of others, to seal the generations.

Warm others by the fire of your faith

Now, I am teaching a true principle. I am teaching doctrine. It is written that "the principle [agrees] precisely with the doctrine which is commanded you in the revelation" (D&C 128:7).

In the hymn "How Firm a Foundation," which was published in 1835 in the first Latter-day Saint hymnbook, we find these words:

E'en down to old age, all my people
shall prove
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable
love;
And then, when gray hair shall their
temples adorn, . . .
Like lambs shall they still in my bosom
be borne.
[*Hymns*, no. 85]

Keep the fire of your testimony of the restored gospel and your witness of our Redeemer burning so brightly that our children can warm their hands by the fire of your faith. That is what grandfathers and grandmothers are to do! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

A prayer for the children

At the close of His first day teaching among the Nephite faithful, the resurrected Jesus turned His attention to a special audience which often stands just below the level of our gaze, sometimes nearly out of sight. The sacred record says:

“He commanded that their little children should be brought [forward]. . . .

“And . . . when they had knelt upon the ground, . . . he himself also knelt . . . ; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, . . . so great and marvelous [were the] things . . . [He did] speak unto the Father. . . .

“. . . When Jesus had made an end of praying . . . , he arose . . . and . . . wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and [again] prayed unto the Father for them.

“And when he had done this he wept again; . . . [saying] unto the multitude, . . . Behold your little ones.”

We cannot know exactly what the Savior was feeling in such a poignant moment, but we do know that He was “troubled” and that He “groaned within himself” over the destructive influences always swirling around the innocent.¹ We know He felt a great need to pray for and bless the children.

In such times as we are in, whether the threats be global or local or in individual lives, I too pray for the children. Some days it seems that a sea of temptation and transgression inundates them—simply washes over them before they can successfully withstand it, before they should have to face it. And often at least some of the forces at work seem beyond our personal control.

Well, some of them may be beyond our control, but I testify with faith in the living God that they are not beyond His.

He lives, and priesthood power is at work on both sides of the veil. We are not alone, and we do not tremble as if abandoned. In doing our part, we can live the gospel and defend its principles. We can declare to others the sure Way, the saving Truth, the joyful Life.² We can personally repent in any way we need to repent, and when we have done all, we can pray. In all these ways we can bless one another and especially those who need our protection the most—the children. As parents we can hold life together the way it is always held together—with love and faith, passed on to the next generation, one child at a time.

The price of cynicism and skepticism

In offering such a prayer for the young, may I address a rather specific aspect of their safety? In this I speak carefully and lovingly to any of the adults of the Church, parents or otherwise, who may be given to cynicism or skepticism, who in matters of whole-souled devotion always seem to hang back a little, who at the Church’s doctrinal campsite always like to pitch their tents out on the periphery of religious faith. To all such—whom we do love and wish were more comfortable camping nearer to us—I say, please be aware that the full price to be paid for such a stance does not always come due in your lifetime. No, sadly, some elements of this can be a kind of profligate national debt, with payments coming out of your children’s and grandchildren’s pockets in far more expensive ways than you ever intended it to be.

In this Church there is an enormous amount of room—and scriptural commandment—for studying and learning, for comparing and considering, for discussion and awaiting further revelation. We all learn “line upon line, precept upon precept,”³ with the goal being authentic reli-

gious faith informing genuine Christlike living. In this there is no place for coercion or manipulation, no place for intimidation or hypocrisy. But no child in this Church should be left with uncertainty about his or her parents' devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Restoration of His Church, and the reality of living prophets and apostles who, now as in earlier days, lead that Church according to "the will of the Lord, . . . the mind of the Lord, . . . the word of the Lord, . . . and the power of God unto salvation."⁴ In such basic matters of faith, prophets do not apologize for requesting unity, indeed conformity, in the eloquent sense that the Prophet Joseph Smith used that latter word.⁵ In any case, as Elder Neal Maxwell once said to me in a hallway conversation, "There didn't seem to be any problem with conformity the day the Red Sea opened."

Conveying our convictions to our children

Parents simply cannot flirt with skepticism or cynicism, then be surprised when their children expand that flirtation into full-blown romance. If in matters of faith and belief children are at risk of being swept downstream by this intellectual current or that cultural rapid, we as their parents must be more certain than ever to hold to anchored, unmistakable moorings clearly recognizable to those of our own household. It won't help anyone if we go over the edge with them, explaining through the roar of the falls all the way down that we really did know the Church was true and that the keys of the priesthood really were lodged there but we just didn't want to stifle anyone's freedom to think otherwise. No, we can hardly expect the children to get to shore safely if the parents don't seem to know where to anchor their own boat. Isaiah once used a variation on such imagery when he said of unbelievers, "[Their] tacklings are loosed;

they could not . . . strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail."⁶

I think some parents may not understand that even when they feel secure in their own minds regarding matters of personal testimony, they can nevertheless make that faith too difficult for their children to detect. We can be reasonably active, meeting-going Latter-day Saints, but if we do not live lives of gospel integrity and convey to our children powerful, heartfelt convictions regarding the truthfulness of the Restoration and the divine guidance of the Church from the First Vision to this very hour, then those children may, to our regret but not surprise, turn out *not* to be visibly active, meeting-going Latter-day Saints or sometimes anything close to it.

If parents stray, children may stray farther

Not long ago Sister Holland and I met a fine young man who came in contact with us after he had been roaming around through the occult and sorting through a variety of Eastern religions, all in an attempt to find religious faith. His father, he admitted, believed in nothing whatsoever. But his grandfather, he said, was actually a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "But he didn't do much with it," the young man said. "He was always pretty cynical about the Church." From a grandfather who is cynical to a son who is agnostic to a grandson who is now looking desperately for what God had already once given his family! What a classic example of the warning Elder Richard L. Evans once gave. Said he:

"Sometimes some parents mistakenly feel that they can relax a little as to conduct and conformity or take perhaps a so called liberal view of basic and fundamental things—thinking that a little laxness or indulgence won't matter—or they may fail to teach or to attend Church, or may voice critical views. Some parents . . . seem to

feel that they can ease up a little on the fundamentals without affecting their family or their family's future. *But,*" he observed, "*if a parent goes a little off course, the children are likely to exceed the parent's example.*"⁷

To lead a child (or anyone else!), even inadvertently, away from faithfulness, away from loyalty and bedrock belief simply because we want to be clever or independent is license no parent nor any other person has ever been given. In matters of religion, a skeptical mind is not a higher manifestation of virtue than is a believing heart, and analytical deconstruction in the field of, say, literary fiction can be just plain old-fashioned destruction when transferred to families yearning for faith at home. And such a deviation from the true course can be deceptively slow and subtle in its impact. As one observer said, "[If you raise the temperature of my] bath water . . . only 1 degree every 10 minutes, how [will I know when to scream?]"⁸

Live the gospel conspicuously

When erecting their sacred tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai, the ancient children of Israel were commanded to make firm their supporting cords and strengthen the stakes which held them.⁹ The reason? Storms arise in life—regularly. So fix it; fasten it; then fix and fasten it again. Even then we know that some children will make choices that break their parents' hearts. Moms and dads can do everything right and yet have children who stray. Moral agency still obtains. But even in such painful hours it will be comforting for you to know that your children knew of your abiding faith in Christ, in His true Church, in the keys of the priesthood, and in those who hold them. It will be comforting then for you to know that if your children choose to leave the straight and narrow way, they leave it very conscious that their parents were firmly in it. Furthermore, they will be

much more likely to return to that path when they come to themselves¹⁰ and recall the loving example and gentle teachings you offered them there.

Live the gospel as conspicuously as you can. Keep the covenants your children know you have made. Give priesthood blessings. And bear your testimony!¹¹ Don't just assume your children will somehow get the drift of your beliefs on their own. The prophet Nephi said near the end of his life that they had written their record of Christ and preserved their convictions regarding His gospel in order "to *persuade* our children . . . that our children may *know* . . . [and believe] the right way."¹²

What do children know from watching us?

Nephi-like, might we ask ourselves what our children know? From us? Personally? Do our children know that we love the scriptures? Do they see us reading them and marking them and clinging to them in daily life? Have our children ever unexpectedly opened a closed door and found us on our knees in prayer? Have they heard us not only pray *with* them but also pray *for* them out of nothing more than sheer parental love? Do our children know we believe in fasting as something more than an obligatory first-Sunday-of-the-month hardship? Do they know that we have fasted for them and for their future on days about which they knew nothing? Do they know we love being in the temple, not least because it provides a bond to them that neither death nor the legions of hell can break? Do they know we love and sustain local and general leaders, imperfect as they are, for their willingness to accept callings they did not seek in order to preserve a standard of righteousness they did not create? Do those children know that we love God with all our heart and that we long to see the face—and fall at the feet—of His Only Begotten Son? I pray that they know this.

The holder of the bow

Brothers and sisters, our children take their flight into the future with our thrust and with our aim. And even as we anxiously watch that arrow in flight and know all the evils that can deflect its course after it has left our hand, nevertheless we take courage in remembering that the most important mortal factor in determining that arrow's destination will be the stability, strength, and unwavering certainty of the holder of the bow.¹³

Carl Sandburg once said, "A baby is God's opinion that life should go on."¹⁴ For that baby's future as well as your own, be strong. Be believing. Keep loving and keep testifying. Keep praying. Those prayers will be heard and answered in the most unexpected hour. God will send aid to no one more readily than He will send it to a child—and to the parent of a child.

"And [Jesus] said unto them: Behold your little ones.

"And . . . they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending . . . as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them."¹⁵

May it always be so, I earnestly pray—for the children—in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 17:11, 14–16, 18, 21–23.
2. See John 14:6.
3. 2 Nephi 28:30.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 68:4.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:13.
6. Isaiah 33:23.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1964, 135–36; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1964, 1102; italics added.
8. Marshall McLuhan, quoted in John Leo, "The Proper Place for Commercials," *U.S. News and World Report*, 30 Oct. 1989, 71.
9. See Isaiah 54:2; 3 Nephi 22:2.
10. See Luke 15:17.
11. See Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 37 for a defining statement on the parental power of human testimony.
12. 2 Nephi 25:23, 26, 28; italics added.
13. I am indebted to Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* for the suggestion of this metaphor.
14. In *The Columbia World of Quotations* (1996), no. 48047.
15. 3 Nephi 17:23–24.

Elder Spencer V. Jones

Encounter with a skunk

Every decision we make, good or bad, carries an accompanying consequence.

I grew up in what some of you might call a boring farming community: Virden, New Mexico, population 135. One summer night when I was a boy, my cousins, some friends, and I were looking for ways to create some excitement. Someone suggested we play a harmless prank on a neighbor. My conscience whispered it was

wrong, but I didn't have the courage to resist the enthusiastic response of the group.

After performing our mischievous act, we sprinted down the dark country road to make our escape, laughing and congratulating ourselves as we ran. Suddenly, one of the group stumbled, crying out, "Oh no, I kicked a cat!" Almost instantly we felt a very fine mist settle over us. It carried a horrible odor. What my friend thought was a cat was actually a skunk. It had sprayed us in self-defense.

Very few odors are as nauseating as skunk spray, and we smelled terrible.

Dejectedly we went home in search of a little parental comfort for our pitiful plight. As we stepped inside the kitchen door, Mom took one sniff and shooed us out into the yard. We were cast out of our home. Then she launched the cleansing process. She burned our clothes. Then, it seemed that every home remedy or concoction in the community was volunteered in our behalf. Among them, we endured a variety of baths: first tomato juice, then cow's milk, and even harsh homemade lye soap. But the stench remained. Even my dad's powerful aftershave lotion could not overpower the stench. For days we were condemned to eat outside under a tree, sleep outdoors in a tent, and ride in the back of the pickup truck.

After a while, naively thinking the smell was gone, we tried to approach some normal-smelling girls. They would not allow us within yards, shattering our fragile teenage egos!

Consequences of sin cannot be hidden

Now, I must admit that being sprayed by a skunk is not a common consequence of sin. Most consequences are not as immediate or dramatic. But sooner or later, for all sin, a consequence will be paid.

At times, consequences of sin may appear to be very subtle to the sinner. We may even convince ourselves, as we did before approaching the girls, that no one will be able to detect our sins and that they are well concealed. But always to our Heavenly Father and often to spiritually sensitive leaders, parents, and friends, our sins are glaringly apparent.

While attending a youth fireside with Elder Richard G. Scott, I noticed five youths scattered among the congregation whose countenances or body language almost screamed that something was spiritually amiss in their lives. After the meeting, when I mentioned the five youths to El-

der Scott, he simply replied, "There were eight."

Isaiah prophesied, "Their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it" (2 Nephi 13:9; see also Isaiah 3:9).

God has declared, "He that sinneth and repenteth not shall be cast out" (D&C 42:28). Just as my cousins and I were "cast out" of our earthly home as a consequence of our prank, we will be cast out of our Heavenly Father's home if we do not repent.

"When we undertake to cover our sins," as I tried to do with my dad's aftershave lotion, "the heavens withdraw themselves; [and] the Spirit of the Lord is grieved" (D&C 121:37). We lose our spiritual gifts. The Lord has declared, "He that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received" (D&C 1:33).

Being cleansed from the stench of sin

Each one of us has the Light of Christ, or a conscience. It constantly prompts us to choose good. Good choices yield good consequences. On the other hand, delaying repentance and continuing to commit sin is like continuing to kick the skunk. The stench will become stronger with each sin, alienating us further and further from God and those we love. Soon we could become like Laman and Lemuel, who, after continually making bad choices, became "past feeling" and could no longer feel the "still small voice" (1 Nephi 17:45).

If I had responded to my conscience when it first whispered that the prank was wrong, I would have avoided the whole stinking ordeal.

Through Nephi, the Savior taught that "no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore, ye must be cast off forever" (1 Nephi 10:21).

But our loving Heavenly Father, with a foreknowledge of our frailties, and know-

ing that you and I would all sin and become unclean, provided a cleansing process from sin that—unlike tomato juice, milk, and lye soap—actually does work.

He sent a Savior, His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins (see Alma 22:14).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, as the Savior demonstrated perfect obedience, His anguish caused Him, “even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (D&C 19:18). Then He allowed Himself to be “lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 11:33).

“He suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. . . And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!” (D&C 18:11, 13).

The Savior has indicated how to know “if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43). Then comes the miraculous promise: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

If the Spirit is pricking your heart to correct something in your life, know this: your soul is precious. Heavenly Father wants you to be part of His eternal family.

I lovingly plead, “Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance” (Alma 34:33). Start the process now. Remove the stench of sin with the remedy of repentance. Then, through the Atonement, the Savior can wash you clean. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Faust

The choir and congregation will now sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder D. Rex Gerratt and Elder F. Burton Howard of the Seventy will address us. We will then be pleased to hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”

Elder D. Rex Gerratt

Follow the instructions

Some years ago while I was serving as a ward clerk, the ward supplies for the new year arrived on my doorstep. Among the numerous boxes, one box addressed to the ward clerk caught my attention. Taped to the box was a tag with bold type: “If all else fails—Please! Follow instructions.”

I did not consider this generic, and I was sure that someone at Church headquarters knew me personally.

Although humorous at the time, the image of this little tag has permanently attached its message to my mind: “If all else fails—Please! Follow instructions.”

Every person experiences many challenges in this mortal life. Each has per-

sonal agency to make choices that affect his or her progress. Good choices bring promised blessings, and bad choices always bring undesired consequences.

Life is uncertain. Our time is short. It is precious. This is the time “to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). There is not time to waste in personal experimentation or involvement with those things that have been proven harmful to our bodies and our souls.

None of us are perfect, and we all need help. But we are not left alone if we are teachable, with hearts to feel and ears to hear.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6).

How to receive instructions from the Lord

How do we receive instruction?

First, we must have a sincere desire.

Second, we must have faith—to believe the Lord knows us, that He loves us, and that He will give us answers to our prayers.

As Joseph Smith was reading the Bible, he read in James 1:5:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

Joseph followed instructions and received an answer to his prayer. We will also receive answers to our prayers.

During my lifetime I have been a farmer and a father of a large family. Even though personal and family prayer have always been a daily part of our lives, on occasion I have felt an overwhelming need to go into the field at night or kneel by the haystack, look up into the heavens, and speak aloud to my Father in Heaven. I have always felt His warmth and knew then, as I know now, that He is listening to me and will answer my prayers in His wisdom for my best good.

To all, wherever you are—to you who need hope, to you who need comfort, to you who are unhappy, to you who need direction and need to feel a purpose in your lives—my dear friends, I encourage you, I urge you to bow your head or drop to your knees! In your own words, thank your Heavenly Father for His Son's atoning sacrifice for you and for all the blessings He has given you. Tears will moisten your eyes, and the warmth of the Spirit will come into your heart.

Then talk to the Lord, asking for comfort, direction, and understanding. As you

open your mind and heart to feel the Spirit, the Lord in His own time and in His own way will give you the instructions which will bless your life.

Instructions in the scriptures

The scriptures also contain instructions of ancient and modern prophets. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

In this dispensation the Lord has given us the comforting counsel to "be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart . . . that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy" (D&C 98:14).

Following instructions requires hard work, commitment, and enduring to the end.

"Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20).

"And again I say unto you, if ye observe to do whatsoever I command you, I, the Lord, will turn away all wrath and indignation from you, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you" (D&C 98:22).

"If ye are prepared ye shall not fear" (D&C 38:30).

Instructions from the living prophet

As in times past, we receive instructions from the Lord's living prophet. I testify to you that I know President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's prophet today. He gives to us inspired counsel for our time.

In the October 2001 general conference he said:

"Now, today, we are faced with particular problems, serious and consuming and difficult and of great concern to us. Surely we have need for the Lord. . . .

"Our safety lies in the virtue of our lives. Our strength lies in our righteousness. God has made it clear that if we will not forsake Him, He will not forsake us" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 112; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 90).

Hearken to the counsel

After receiving instructions, we need to be obedient and hearken to the counsel we receive. We need to listen to and follow our appointed leaders.

On one occasion the Savior looked upon the multitude as sheep having no shepherd (see Matthew 9:36). Every member in this Church has shepherds. We call

them quorum leaders, bishops, and stake presidents.

The Lord admonishes us to search the scriptures and to follow the commandments.

He has promised that all His words shall be fulfilled, "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

The Lord declared that "whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (D&C 68:4).

"If all else fails—Please! Follow instructions."

May we do this, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder F. Burton Howard

Eternal marriage

A number of years ago my wife and I went to a garden wedding reception. Earlier that day we had been to the temple, where two young people we knew had been married for time and all eternity. They were much in love. The circumstances of their meeting had been almost miraculous. Many tears of happiness were shed. We stood in the reception line at the end of a perfect day. Ahead of us was a close friend of the family. As he approached the couple, he stopped and in a beautiful, clear tenor voice sang to them the stirring words from the book of Ruth:

"Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die" (Ruth 1:16–17).

We were deeply touched and felt reassured about their prospects for happiness—this in part, I suppose, because my wife and I have had these same words on the wall of our home for many years.

Sadly, the significance of these beautiful words is subsiding. Far too many marriages today end in divorce. Selfishness, sin, and personal convenience often prevail over covenants and commitment.

The culminating element of God's plan

Eternal marriage is a principle which was established before the foundation of the world and was instituted on this earth before death came into it. Adam and Eve were given to each other by God in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. The scripture says:

"In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;

"Male and female created he them; and *blessed* them" (Genesis 5:1–2; italics added).

The prophets have uniformly taught that the consummate and culminating element of God's great plan for the blessing of His children is eternal marriage. President Ezra Taft Benson stated, "Faithfulness to the marriage covenant brings the fullest joy here and glorious rewards hereafter" (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 533–34). President Howard W. Hunter described celestial marriage as "the crowning gospel ordinance" and clarified that "while it may take somewhat longer [for some,] perhaps even beyond this mortal life," it would not be denied to any worthy individual (*The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams [1997], 132, 140). President Gordon B. Hinckley has called eternal marriage a wonderful thing (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 93; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 71) and a "gift, precious beyond all others" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1974, 32; or *Ensign*, May 1974, 23).

However, notwithstanding the grandeur and glory of the gift, it is not free. In fact, it is conditional, and having been given, it may be withdrawn if we do not keep the conditions of the covenant which accompanies it. Section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that "in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man [that means a woman too] must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]" (D&C 131:1–2).

Our obligations in the marriage covenant

A covenant is a sacred promise. We promise to do some things, and God binds Himself to do others. To those who keep the covenant of marriage, God promises the fulness of His glory, eternal lives, eternal increase, exaltation in the celestial kingdom, and a fulness of joy. We all know that, but sometimes we don't give much thought to what we have to do to receive these blessings. The scriptures seem to say

clearly that at least three obligations are inherent in this covenant.

Continue to grow and improve

First, an eternal marriage is eternal. *Eternal* implies continuing growth and improvement. It means that man and wife will honestly try to perfect themselves. It means that the marriage relationship is not to be frivolously discarded at the first sign of disagreement or when times get hard. It signifies that love will grow stronger with time and that it extends beyond the grave. It means that each partner will be blessed with the company of the other partner forever and that problems and differences might as well be resolved because they are not going to go away. *Eternal* signifies repentance, forgiveness, long-suffering, patience, hope, charity, love, and humility. All of these things are involved in anything that is eternal, and surely we must learn and practice them if we intend to claim an eternal marriage.

Invite God into the marriage; be equal, true

Second, an eternal marriage is ordained of God. This means that the parties to the marriage covenant agree to invite God into their marriage, to pray together, to keep the commandments, to keep wants and passions within certain limits that the prophets have outlined. It means to be equal companions and to be just as true and pure outside the home as inside the home. That is part of what *ordained of God* means.

Bear and teach children; sustain each other

Third, eternal marriage is a kind of partnership with God. He promises a continuation of lives to those who are sealed together in the temple. There is a oneness with the Creator implied in the commandment given to Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth. There is an obliga-

tion to teach children the gospel, for they are His children too. Thus we have family home evening and scripture study, gospel conversations, and service to others. There would seem to be an obligation to support and sustain each other in callings and roles that each is given to perform. How can we claim to be one with God if we cannot sustain one another when the wife is called to serve in the Primary or the husband in the bishopric?

Abuse and sin violate the covenant

So the covenant of marriage implies at least these things and probably others. I may miss the mark, but I don't think by far, when I say that those who verbally or physically abuse their wives or husbands, or those who degrade or demean or exercise unrighteous dominion in a marriage, are not keeping the covenant. Nor are those who neglect the commandments or who fail to sustain their leaders. Even those who merely decline callings, neglect neighbors, or moderately adopt worldly ways are at risk. If we are not keeping our part of the covenant, we have no promise.

Be committed to making marriage work

Most of all, I think eternal marriage cannot be achieved without a commitment to make it work. Most of what I know about this I have learned from my companion. We have been married for almost 47 years now. From the beginning she knew what kind of marriage she wanted.

Silverware exemplifies a vision of marriage

We started as poor college students, but her vision for our marriage was exemplified by a set of silverware. As is common today, when we married she registered with a local department store. Instead of listing all the pots and pans and appliances we needed and hoped to receive, she chose another course. She asked for silverware.

She chose a pattern and the number of place settings and listed knives, forks, and spoons on the wedding registry and nothing else. No towels, no toasters, no television—just knives, forks, and spoons.

The wedding came and went. Our friends and our parents' friends gave gifts. We departed for a brief honeymoon and decided to open the presents when we returned. When we did so, we were shocked. There was not a single knife or fork in the lot. We joked about it and went on with our lives.

Two children came along while we were in law school. We had no money to spare. But when my wife worked as a part-time election judge or when someone gave her a few dollars for her birthday, she would quietly set it aside, and when she had enough she would go to town to buy a fork or a spoon. It took us several years to accumulate enough pieces to use them.

Protecting the silverware from tarnish

When we finally had service for four, we began to invite some of our friends for dinner. Before they came, we would have a little discussion in the kitchen. Which utensils would we use, the battered and mismatched stainless or the special silverware? In those early days I would often vote for the stainless. It was easier. You could just throw it in the dishwasher after the meal, and it took care of itself.

The silver, on the other hand, was a lot of work. My wife had it hidden away under the bed where it could not be found easily by a burglar. She had insisted that I buy a tarnish-free cloth to wrap it in. Each piece was in a separate pocket, and it was no easy task to assemble all the pieces. When the silver was used, it had to be hand washed and dried so that it would not spot, and put back in the pockets so it would not tarnish, and wrapped up and carefully hidden again so it would not get stolen. If any tarnish was discovered, I was

sent to buy silver polish, and together we carefully rubbed the stains away.

Caring for the silverware

Over the years we added to the set, and I watched with amazement how she cared for the silver. My wife was never one to get angry easily. However, I remember the day when one of our children somehow got hold of one of the silver forks and wanted to use it to dig up the backyard. That attempt was met with a fiery glare and a warning not to even think about it—ever!

I noticed that the silverware never went to the many ward dinners she cooked or never accompanied the many meals she made and sent to others who were sick or needy. It never went on picnics and never went camping. In fact it never went anywhere; and, as time went by, it didn't even come to the table very often. Some of our friends were weighed in the balance, found wanting, and didn't even know it. They got the stainless when they came to dinner.

The time came when we were called to go on a mission. I arrived home one day and was told that I had to rent a safe-deposit box for the silver. She didn't want to take it with us. She didn't want to leave it behind. And she didn't want to lose it.

How to treat what you want to last forever

For years I thought she was a little bit eccentric, and then one day I realized that she had known for a long time something that I was just beginning to understand. If you want something to last forever, you treat it differently. You shield it and protect it. You never abuse it. You don't expose it to the elements. You don't make it common or ordinary. If it ever becomes tarnished, you lovingly polish it until it gleams like new. It becomes special because you have made it so, and it grows more beautiful and precious as time goes by.

Eternal marriage is just like that. We need to treat it just that way. I pray that we may see it for the priceless gift that it is, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Give thanks in all things

In one of the times of spiritual and temporal adversity recorded in the Book of Mormon, when the people of God were “suffering all manner of afflictions,” the Lord commanded them “to give thanks in all things” (Mosiah 26:38, 39). I wish to apply that teaching to our time.

The children of God have always been commanded to give thanks. There are examples throughout the Old and New Testaments. The Apostle Paul wrote, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The prophet Alma taught, “When thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God”

(Alma 37:37). And in modern revelation the Lord declared that “he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold” (D&C 78:19).

Gratitude for the Savior, revealed truths

We have so much for which to give thanks. First and foremost, we are thankful for our Savior Jesus Christ. Under the plan of the Father, He created the world. Through His prophets, He revealed the plan of salvation with its accompanying commandments and ordinances. He came into mortality to teach and show us the way. He suffered and paid the price for

our sins if we would repent. He gave up His life, and He conquered death and rose from the grave that we all will live again. He is the Light and Life of the World. As King Benjamin taught, if we “should render all the thanks and praise which [our] whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created [us], and has kept and preserved [us], and . . . should serve him with all [our] whole souls yet [we] would be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2:20–21).

We give thanks for the revealed truths that provide a standard against which to measure all things. As the Bible teaches, the Lord gave us apostles and prophets “for the perfecting of the saints” (see Ephesians 4:11–12). We use the revealed truth they give us, “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

Those who view every calamity and measure every new assertion or discovery against the standard of revealed truth need not be “tossed to and fro” but can be steady and at peace. God is in His heavens, and His promises are sure. “Be not troubled,” He has said to us concerning the destructions that will precede the end of the world, “for, when all these things shall come to pass, ye may know that the promises which have been made unto you shall be fulfilled” (D&C 45:35). What an anchor to the soul in these troubled times!

We give thanks for commandments. They are directions away from pitfalls, and they are invitations to blessings. Commandments mark the path and show us the way to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come.

Testimonies of gratitude for the gospel

In the past eight months in the Philippines, I have heard many testimonies of the blessings of the gospel. Speaking at

the dedication of his ward chapel, a Filipino bishop expressed his gratitude for the gospel message that came into his life about 10 years ago. He described how it rescued him from a life of selfishness, excess, and abusive practices and made him a good husband and father. He testified of the blessings that had come to him from paying his tithing.

Speaking at a leadership meeting, a counselor in a stake presidency who is a lawyer and community leader said, “I can declare to the whole world without mental reservation that the greatest thing that ever happened in my life is my becoming a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It . . . made a great difference in my life and that of my family, even if I feel there is more that I should learn and apply in my life. The Church is indeed a marvelous work and a wonder.”

You do not have to travel to the Philippines to experience such testimonies. They are evident wherever the gospel message is received and lived. But Sister Oaks and I are profoundly grateful for our opportunity to live and serve in the Philippines, where we have met thousands of wonderful members in new surroundings and seen the gospel in a new light.

The process of establishing the Church

In the developing world we learn the importance of establishing the Church—not just teaching and baptizing, but retaining the new members by loving, by calling and ordaining, and by nourishing with the good word of God. We have learned the importance of challenging members to abandon cultural traditions that are contrary to gospel commandments and covenants and to live so that they and their posterity “are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; . . . built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:19–20).

People who do this become part of the worldwide gospel culture of commandments and covenants and ordinances and blessings. Such people experience “a mighty change” in their hearts, “that [they] have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (*Mosiah* 5:2). The image of God is “engraven upon [their] countenances” (*Alma* 5:19). Such followers of Christ are found in every land where the gospel and the Church have been established. We have many of them in the Philippines, and we are working to encourage more of them. We do this by growing from our centers of strength, concentrating our teaching where there are sufficiently large groups of committed members to provide the friendshipping, the teachings, the role models, and the needed assistance to the struggling newly born members who are just learning what the gospel asks of us and gives to us.

Be grateful even for afflictions

The revelations, for which we are grateful, show that we should even give thanks for our afflictions because they turn our hearts to God and give us opportunities to prepare for what God would have us become. The Lord taught the prophet Moroni, “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble,” and then promised that “if they humble themselves . . . and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (*Ether* 12:27). In the midst of the persecutions the Latter-day Saints were suffering in Missouri, the Lord gave a similar teaching and promise: “Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks; . . . and all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good” (*D&C* 98:1, 3). And to Joseph Smith in the afflictions of Liberty Jail, the Lord said, “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience,

and shall be for thy good” (*D&C* 122:7). Brigham Young understood. Said he:

“There is not a single condition of life [or] one hour’s experience but what is beneficial to all those who make it their study, and aim to improve upon the experience they gain” (*Deseret News Weekly*, 9 July 1862, 1).

As someone has said, there is a big difference between 20 years’ experience and one year’s experience repeated 20 times. If we understand the Lord’s teachings and promises, we will learn and grow from our adversities.

Many of the inspired teachings of our modern prophets are compiled in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, our course of study for Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society. The timeless doctrines and principles included in these books are fountains of divine wisdom and guidance. Wise teachers in wards and branches will not substitute their own subjects and wisdom but focus on these inspired teachings and their application to current circumstances and challenges.

For example, in the current volume we read these words of President John Taylor on the subject of gratitude for suffering: “We have learned many things through suffering. We call it suffering. I call it a school of experience. . . . I have never looked at these things in any other light than trials for the purpose of purifying the Saints of God that they may be, as the scriptures say, as gold that has been seven times purified by the fire” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* [2001], 203).

Pioneers like President John Taylor, who witnessed the murder of their prophet and experienced prolonged persecution and incredible hardships for their faith, praised God and thanked Him. Through their challenges and the courageous and inspired actions they took to meet them, they grew in faith and in spiritual stature. Through their afflictions they became

what God desired them to become, and they laid the foundation of the great work that blesses our lives today.

Like the pioneers, we should thank God for our adversities and pray for guidance in meeting them. Through that attitude and through our faith and obedience, we will realize the promises God has given us. It is all part of the plan.

Strength is forged in adversity

I love the musical and motion picture *Fiddler on the Roof*. There a wonderful Jewish father sings “If I Were a Rich Man.” His memorable prayer concludes with this pleading question:

Lord, who made the lion and the lamb,
You decreed I should be what I am;
Would it spoil some vast eternal plan,
If I were a wealthy man?

[Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick (1964)]

Yes, Tevye, it might. Let us give thanks for what we are and for the circumstances God has given us for our personal journey through mortality.

In ancient times the prophet Lehi taught this truth to his son Jacob:

“In thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren.

“Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:1–2).

My mother loved that scripture and lived its principle. The greatest affliction of her life was the death of her husband, our father, after only 11 years of marriage. This changed her life and imposed great hardships as she proceeded to earn a living and raise her three little children alone. Nevertheless, I often heard her say that the Lord consecrated that affliction for her gain because her husband’s death compelled her to develop her talents and serve and become something that she could never have become without that seeming tragedy. Our

mother was a spiritual giant, strong and fully worthy of the loving tribute her three children inscribed on her headstone: “Her Faith Strengthened All.”

The blessings of adversity extend to others. I know it was a blessing to be raised by a widowed mother whose children had to learn how to work, early and hard. I know that relative poverty and hard work are not greater adversities than affluence and abundant free time. I also know that strength is forged in adversity and that faith is developed in a setting where we cannot see ahead.

Adversity can further the work of God

When we give thanks in all things, we see hardships and adversities in the context of the purpose of life. We are sent here to be tested. There must be opposition in *all* things. We are meant to learn and grow through that opposition, through meeting our challenges, and through teaching others to do the same. Our beloved colleague Elder Neal A. Maxwell has given us a noble example of this. His courage, his submissive attitude in accepting his affliction with cancer, and his stalwart continued service have ministered comfort to thousands and taught eternal principles to millions. His example shows that the Lord will not only consecrate our afflictions for our gain, but He will use them to bless the lives of countless others.

Jesus taught this lesson when He and His disciples met a man who was born blind. “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” the disciples asked. “Neither,” Jesus answered. The man was born blind “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:2, 3).

If we see life through the lens of spirituality, we can see many examples of the works of God being furthered through the adversities of His children. I often visit the American War Memorial in Manila. To me, that is a sacred place. It is the burial

place of over 17,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen who lost their lives in World War II battles in the Pacific. The memorial also honors over 36,000 other servicemen who also lost their lives but whose bodies were never recovered. As I walk past the beautiful walls where are inscribed their names and the state of their origin, I see many that I suppose were faithful Latter-day Saints.

Reflecting on the wartime deaths of so many worthy and wonderful members and how much suffering this has caused their loved ones, I have thought of President Joseph F. Smith's great vision recorded in the 138th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. He saw "an innumerable company" of righteous spirits "who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality" (D&C 138:12). They were organized and appointed as messengers, "clothed with power and authority, and commissioned . . . to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, . . . and thus was the gospel preached to the dead" (D&C 138:30). Reflecting on this revelation and remembering the millions who have fallen in war, I rejoice in the Lord's plan, in which the adversity of the deaths of many righteous individuals is turned into the blessing of righteous messengers to preach the gospel to their countless comrades-in-arms.

When we understand this principle, that God offers us opportunities for blessings and blesses us through our own adversities and the adversities of others, we can understand why He has commanded us again and again to "thank the Lord thy God in all things" (D&C 59:7).

I pray that we will be blessed to understand the truth and purpose of the doctrines and commandments I have described and that we will be faithful enough and strong enough to give thanks in all things. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer and Creator, for whom we

give thanks, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Come, Ye Children of the Lord."

President Faust

The choir has sung "Come, Ye Children of the Lord."

As we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir; the combined choir from Brigham Young University; and the Melchizedek Priesthood choir from the stakes in Bluffdale, Riverton, and Herriman, Utah; and their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given this conference; the doctors, Church health unit nurses, and ambulance services which have been on hand to render assistance; the ushers and interpreters; and those who are responsible for the beautiful flowers on Temple Square and in the Conference Center.

We also express appreciation to the local and national media representatives for their coverage of the conference and to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations, cable systems, and Internet service providers who have given time and made facilities available to carry sessions of this conference in many countries.

As you leave the conference, we ask you to obey traffic rules, to use caution, and to be courteous in driving.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "God Bless Our Prophet Dear." The benediction will then be offered by Elder John H. Groberg of the Seventy, and this conference will be adjourned for six months.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Gratitude for conference

Well, my beloved brethren and sisters, it's all over but the work. How grateful we all ought to feel for this wonderful conference. We have met together in peace without disturbance of any kind. We have reflected much on the wonderful blessings of the Lord. Our appreciation for the tremendous blessings which we have in the gospel has been greatly strengthened. As we have heard the testimonies of the speakers, our own witness of the truth has been rekindled into a bright and burning flame. I hope that everyone who has participated in this great conference has been touched for good, that each of us is a better man or woman for our experience together these past two days. I speak for myself when I say that I feel closer to the Lord. I hope this has been your experience. I have a strengthened desire to obey His commandments, to live His teachings, and to commune with Him in prayer, thereby preserving a relationship with Him who is my Father and my God.

And so, as we conclude this great gathering of Latter-day Saints, I offer a plea that each of us will seek to live closer to the Lord and to commune with Him more frequently and with increased faith.

Let us be a prayerful people

Fathers and mothers, pray over your children. Pray that they may be shielded from the evils of the world. Pray that they may grow in faith and knowledge. Pray that they may be directed toward lives that will be profitable and good. Husbands, pray for your wives. Express unto the Lord your gratitude for them and plead with Him in their behalf. Wives, pray for your husbands. Many of them walk a very difficult road with countless problems and great perplexities. Plead with the Almighty that

they may be guided, blessed, protected, and inspired in their righteous endeavors.

Pray for peace in the earth, that the Almighty, who governs the universe, will stretch forth His hand and let His Spirit brood upon the people, that the nations may not rage one against another.

Pray for the weather. We have floods in one area and drought in another. I am satisfied that if enough prayers ascend to heaven for moisture upon the land, the Lord will answer those prayers for the sake of the righteous.

Way back in 1969 I was in South America. I flew from Argentina to Santiago, Chile. The Andes mountains were dry. There was no snow. The grass was burned. Chile was in the midst of a devastating drought. The people pleaded for help in bringing moisture.

We dedicated two new buildings on that visit. In each of those dedicatory services we pleaded with the Lord for rain upon the land. I have the testimony of many who were in those meetings that the heavens were opened and the rains fell with such abundance that the people asked the Lord to shut them off.

Pray for wisdom and understanding as you walk the difficult paths of your lives. If you are determined to do foolish and imprudent things, I think the Lord will not prevent you. But if you seek His wisdom and follow the counsel of the impressions that come to you, I am confident that you will be blessed.

Let us be a prayerful people. Let us bring up our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Enos 1:1).

Love and serve the Lord

May the blessings of heaven deservedly rest upon you. In the words of Deuteronomy, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear

the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12). Be assured, my dear brothers and sisters, that "He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps" (Felix Mendelssohn, *Elijah*).

For the blessings of heaven to rest upon you I humbly pray as I express to you my love for each of you. Thank you

for your great kindness to me and your great faithfulness and energy in moving forward the work of the Almighty, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "God Bless Our Prophet Dear."

Elder John H. Groberg offered the benediction.

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE MUSIC

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for the Saturday morning, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon sessions. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir. John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe were the organists.

Music for the Saturday afternoon session was provided by a combined choir from Brigham Young University. Ronald Staheli and Rosalind Hall directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe was the organist.

Music for the priesthood session was provided by a Melchizedek Priesthood choir from stakes in Bluffdale, Riverton, and Herriman, Utah. Thomas Waldron directed the choir, and Richard Elliott was the organist.

Throughout the conference sessions, prelude, postlude, and interlude music and accompaniments on the organ were played by John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe.

F. Michael Watson
Clerk of the Conference

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